



A
VAGABOND
IN ARTS

ALGERNON GISSING



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A VAGABOND IN ARTS.

VOL. II.

A VAGABOND IN ARTS

BY

ALGERNON GISSING

AUTHOR OF

A MOORLAND IDYL, 'A VILLAGE HAMPDEN,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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A VAGABOND IN ARTS.

CHAPTER I.

AUGUSTA.

It was a morning of the most glorious lustre and softness when Ebba and her adventurous friend took their departure from the hills. They started early, and the dew still sparkled on the hill-side, imparting to all the landscape that peculiar delicacy of silver bloom which is the divine halo of the morning. In the clear

and buoyant air, sounds and fragrance travelled freely before the light west wind which whispered through the valley. The cushat and the first cuckoo called from the distant fir-plantation, and, on the slopes, sheep and lambs were bleating ceaselessly. Over all was a profundity of faultless blue, one snow-white curl beautifying the zenith whence came the ripple of many skylarks, as it seemed mere voices of the heavens issuing from their dazzling 'privacy of glorious light.'

In this scene at the vicarage doorway the two young women mounted the vehicle which was to convey them to the nearest station, and, as they drove away, Mr. Wanless, who stood upon the outer step, seemed to wave them a particularly solemn farewell. It remained with his daughter

for a short time, but the exhilarations of their journey inevitably dispelled it. Going in such a spirit as these went, the mere journeying was of supreme importance. The incidents of travel and of an impetuous world, not hackneyed by familiarity, impressed them deeply, and stimulated the intellectual faculties to an extraordinary degree.

Evening saw them passably lodged in a street in Bloomsbury, and Ebba's foremost proposition was a pilgrimage to a restaurant. She unhesitatingly admitted that a meal in what she called 'Johnsonian freedom' was the acme of life to her. But, as she passed the railings of the British Museum, she said to her pre-occupied companion,

'Do you remember the sun on the hills

this morning? Look, it's setting. What a colour old Dunmore will be!

'Ah-ha,' said Handsel, scarce knowing that she answered.

They came into Holborn, and threaded their way along the pavement until they reached such reputable establishment as they required. Handsel had never had the opportunity of observing her friend under circumstances such as these, and she was struck with the modification of which Ebba was capable. The mountain artist evidently found accession of intellectual vigour here, and from it fell into a vein of unrestrained hilarity.

From their sunset supper Ebba set off, clutching Handsel by the arm, for what she herself called 'a glorification through the highways.' She went through Chan-

cery Lane, Fleet Street, the Strand, to Trafalgar Square, pouring forth to her eager companion as they went along literary and historical associations, all of what we may now call the classical ages, and which must have sounded ludicrously naïve and incongruous to any busy ears catching up her ejaculations.

Handsel was dazed. She hazarded at one point to ask her companion how she remembered the way, upon which Ebba rallied her with laughter, observing that she had lived here for years.

‘I think so,’ said the other, and pondered the words.

At a theatre they paused, but ‘Not to-night,’ said Ebba, and onwards again.

In Trafalgar Square, Handsel was permitted to breathe. The various prospects

were pointed out to her and duly impressed upon her imagination. The silhouette dome against the northern sky came last, and was indicated with a peculiar tone of appropriation in the speaker.

‘That is the home of the pictures, Handsel. There the whole of——’

There was a laugh, a voice, and the enthusiastic girl speaker turned in trepidation at the clutch of powerful fingers upon her delicate shoulder. There in the mingled lamp and twilight she confronted the stare of her brother Shiel.

‘You shouldn’t speak so loud here, Abb, if you wish for secrecy. Your voice came like a breath of mountain air to me, as though a curlew had flown with a whistle across the fountains. What in heaven’s name do you here?’

He addressed his sister, but he was now staring at her companion.

‘You have spoilt all, Shiel,’ said Ebba, the whole of her enthusiasm dashed in an instant.

‘By no means,’ said he. ‘I shall not encumber you. Good-night; but’—turning back—‘have you come for her?’

Handsel, at whom the words were aimed, instantly construed them, and stared into Shiel’s eyes.

‘No; is she here?’

At the negative he left them; but Ebba was in a moment at his side.

‘Come to-morrow night to Montague Street, will you?’

‘Possibly;’ and he went on his way.

‘The lass is mad,’ exclaimed Handsel, forcibly, when they were together again.

But for this night, at any rate, Ebba was not to be interfered with. In the murky shadows of St. Martin's Lane her enthusiasm returned to her, and she abandoned herself carelessly to its exuberance.

'This is awful,' murmured Handsel, as her companion paused at Seven Dials to point out the appalling radiations of human enormities which there were focussed, amazed secretly at Ebba's complacent reception of the spectacle.

In the inferno of birds to which they next entered, the chorus of larks in the sunlight that morning rang emphatically in their memories, and neither spoke until they were again in Great Russell Street.

Ebba's first enthusiasm the next day was for the new pictures, and the two set off for Burlington House. In the personal

appearance of the young women there was nothing to excite attention, for even Handsel, clothed in the contemporary refinements of moderate mourning, betrayed no suggestion of a Bæotian soil. A catalogue was procured, and the two critics from the mountains set to work with deliberate conscientiousness. The one of course regarded the canvas with a more or less professional eye, and the constant pose of her critical head was observed of others beside her immediate companion, whilst she made no secret of such remarks as she vouchsafed to outer ears. Handsel was reticent; but she paid undivided attention to her companion's expressed opinions, and strove by sheer force of native intelligence to approach to Ebba's more technical outlook.

As they proceeded, they picked up an acquaintance ; first encountered by being accidentally addressed, familiarly, by Handsel, who thought that it was Ebba at her elbow. They did not know that this young lady had of set purpose cultivated the accident ; had indeed attached herself to them since almost the commencement of their scrutiny, with some such definite intention : but when Miss Wanless found the learning and refinement of the stranger's outlook, she was not slow in responding to her advances. Her appearance was attractive too, clad in her unconventional picturesqueness, and perhaps just a little enviable. Ebba knew her own life to have been so seriously hampered by the extreme isolation of her intellectual effort that even a momentary opportunity of

congenial interchange of impressions came as a very desirable relief to her. Indeed she accorded so well with this new acquaintance that their forces were there and then united for the remainder of the inspection. When they needed rest they sat together, and so rapidly had intellectual affinities become apparent that, on these occasions, a more or less personal tone of intercourse was adopted.

‘Mere impatience,’ said the stranger, vivaciously, at one such time. ‘I never could submit myself to the necessary drill, so never got beyond an amateur sketchiness. In despair I relinquished the pencil for the pen, and added shorthand. I have done vastly better since. I sometimes give rude illustrations to any suitable article of my own, but nothing more.’

‘You contribute regularly, I suppose,’ said Ebba.

‘’Tis my vocation. I had to make my own living, and I am now doing it.’

‘I envy you.’

‘You need not. Directly I heard you speak I felt my insignificance. I am not given to confessions of this sort. An article I am concocting upon these landscapes for the *Herald* will be yours more than mine.’

Ebba’s gaze was fixed resolutely upon her shoes, and she made no reply.

‘Are you not really in the ranks?’ urged the other, but could only elicit a head-shake.

‘You despise journalism?’

‘Not a bit; when it deserves the name.’

‘Then why don’t you take the plunge?’

Ebba explained the remoteness of her domicile, and the impossibility of transferring it.

‘H’m, that is a pity. You would be an invaluable ally. You must excuse me, for I am a fanatic on this subject. I am professionally a recruiting-sergeant for the ranks of liberated women—not emancipated, you observe. That is a vulgar, hackneyed title that I can’t away with. It is a good term lost. I am an uncompromising idealist, and emancipation has got an inevitable materialist ring about it. You sympathise with us?’

‘Immeasurably.’

‘I want to swell the leaven of “the unattached human susceptibilities,” as I saw it put the other day: “to give to the cause of the race the fund of superb devotion

which is frittered away upon individual fatuity.”’

Ebba rather abruptly raised her eyes, recognising, not without amusement, her brother’s printed words.

‘ You read that article ?’ she asked.

‘ Read it and assimilated it. Obviously you did. But did you write it ?’

‘ Oh, no,’ laughed Ebba. ‘ It must be written by a man.’

‘ The solution of many of the world’s problems lies in this movement,’ the fair enthusiast continued. ‘ Woman’s brain is virgin soil at present, and from it may be raised the vitalizing crop which is to regenerate the whole world. Old forces become periodically effete, and that of exclusive man has become flagrantly so, for anything of an elevating nature. Sheer

material stress has opened the way for us, and we are destined to give the old world another lease. When we too are exploded, no doubt the beneficent fates will provide another source.'

The young lady returned Ebba's glance, laughing merrily at her own enthusiasm.

'Don't you feel this?' she said, getting up to go again to the pictures.

'I have often thought it.'

Such an interval would stimulate Ebba to an extraordinary degree, and she would return to her survey with increased eagerness and power of vision. So the time passed.

When they had criticised, refreshed, and grown weary together, there was a mutual disinclination that their intercourse should cease there.

‘You will be in London some time yet?’ said the stranger. ‘Then we must talk of this further. You are so obviously born for the cause. I am so grieved that all this afternoon I shall be engaged. I shall be delighted to come this evening. I am really anxious to see your sketches.’

Ebba scribbled her name and address upon half an envelope. The other took it, glanced, and then stared at her companions. Ebba laughed, and remarked, ‘My brother, but don’t picture him a prophet.’ Then, lowering her eyes to the card which had been given her, she read ‘Miss Augusta Lavington.’

Presently Miss Augusta went on her way rejoicing.

Ebba looked with curiosity for her brother that evening, by no means as-

sured that her reception of him would be so speedily condoned. As a matter of fact, Shiel would just then have condoned a very much more aggressive encounter if thereby he could command a moment's respite from the fire consuming him. He waited impatiently for the time to be off; an inability for all mental employment having pursued him throughout this as the previous day. Just as he resolved to start, there was a knock at his door, and, strange experience for Shiel, a visitor was announced to him.

‘So I have unearthed you at last,’ came in masculine accents of refinement.

‘Why, Cuddie!’ cried Shiel, positively elate in his astonishment. ‘How the dickens are you?’

Mr. Cuthbert, otherwise Burgundy,

Smart, of New College, Oxford, undoubtedly it was.

As they grasped hands Shiel's eyes rested upon his friend's black coat, and he felt therein an unfamiliar incongruity.

'Adding field unto field, I see,' he said, twitching the cloth. 'Not in too close proximity, I hope.'

'My maternal aunt,' said Cuthbert, sitting and smoothing his moustache. 'Quite unexpectedly: the very best of souls. A small estate in Dorsetshire. And—are you going into the Church, Shiel?'

There was always a dry unconscious humour about Smart's excessive smoothness, which had no doubt played some part in originally recommending him to Shiel; coming now so unexpectedly upon his tragic perturbation of soul, the effect

was electrical. For the first time during several years, Shiel exploded with laughter; a long resonant Teufelsdröckhian peal. Cuthbert sat motionless through it.

‘Are you?’ he repeated, at a favourable opportunity.

‘How have I laid myself open to this?’

‘The current *Extemporary*.’

‘I hope you have construed your classics better. You have got a living?’

‘A presentation coincident with my acquiring these fields. The old rector, who had outlived a whole parish or two, had long ago, in jest, promised faithfully to bury my aunt, and, by gad, he redeemed his promise, but departed the very next day. Rational seclusion, and four hundred a-year.’

‘No, don’t be a fool, Cuddie,’ exclaimed

Shiel, with unnecessary vehemence. ‘But let us have a walk. You are at liberty?’ They took their hats and went out.

Shiel led off to the streets, walking for some distance in silence. At length he savagely broke it.

‘Oh, for the key that keeps all this a-going, Cuddie! How do they hide the fatuity?’

‘Personal enjoyment, my dear fellow,’ was the imperturbable reply.

‘That is the whole point at issue,’ snapped Shiel.

‘Two human orders, Shiel,—active and reflective. In this world inevitably heaven for the one, more or less hell for the other.’

‘But the gulf is passable: is—must—shall be passable!’

‘By work, isn’t it? Doesn’t Carlyle say something about it? Try a spell of stonebreaking, if you won’t have my rectory.’

‘I have worked twelve or fourteen hours a day for years,’ said Shiel.

‘At ploughing and harrowing your own soul, my dear boy: try the stones for a change.’

There was a pause.

‘I gather that you have hopelessly quarrelled with Pettipher, else you could have donned the tabard.’

‘Do you think I will write to order?’ fired Wanless. ‘I didn’t understand their methods. My sister saw it before and warned me, when there was a prospect of —bah!’

‘I wonder your sister’s opinion wasn’t

sufficient,' was Cuthbert's dry comment.

Mr. Smart had been privileged to make Ebba's acquaintance on her visit to Shiel at Oxford.

'Yes, I suppose it might have been. Well, which way do you go? Unfortunately, I have an engagement with her to-night.'

'With your sister—is she up here?'

'For a day or two.'

'The deuce,—you must come with her to Craven Hill, Shiel. To-morrow is Thursday,—no; Friday—Fri-day—yes, come up on Friday, won't you? No sort of formality. Only my mother and one sister, with a deaf uncle——'

'Come along and see.' So they went off to Montague Street together.

Now, Ebba had secured the presence of

Miss Lavington for that particular evening, in a fit of purely feminine mischief. She had long perceived her brother's insensibility to sexual sentiment as the cardinal deficiency of his system, and she had on the spur of the moment resolved upon confronting him with the intellectual charms of Augusta; not exactly with any view to his immediate capitulation, but as an opportunity of inaugurating new methods which had been for some time in her mind. She was taken aback, therefore, when her brother appeared in the company of Mr. Smart, even before she had begun to look for the arrival of Augusta.

A restrained kindliness characterized Cuthbert's bearing to Ebba herself; the refined deference scarce veiled under the

mutual pleasantries which their former intercourse warranted between them. When Mr. Smart's object was disclosed to her, she was immovable. She had not come for any social intercourse; she was not prepared for it. The whole gipsy method of her visit would inevitably put her at a disadvantage in the eyes of any polite society. Much as she appreciated the attention, she must really be excused. In the face of such decisiveness Cuthbert was of course too well-bred to offer any persuasion. In a few minutes he took his leave.

‘My mother shall send a proper invitation,’ he said to Shiel, as they were parting at the door. ‘Now, you will come, Shiel, won't you? Would any other day be better?’

There was a desperate struggle in Shiel himself. Was social intercourse the medium?

‘If we get an invitation, Cuddie, we’ll come . . . And—that absurd rectory. Need you fill it at once?’

‘Six months, I think, they allow us.’

‘Of course, it doesn’t matter. Good-bye.’

A young lady came up to the door as they parted, so Shiel, retreating, left the doorway open. In the face of Mr. Smart’s invasion Ebba felt bold enough in the trick she was playing her brother. Just as she began, however, ‘A friend of mine, Shiel, is coming to——’ Augusta was ushered into her presence, and the rest of the explanation was lost in the introduction.

For some time Shiel was aggressively taciturn; he sat in an arm-chair opposite Handsel, pretending to read, whilst Ebba and her visitor were busy over the portfolio at the table. He could watch the two faces in the light without himself exciting any observation.

‘Oh, excellent, excellent!’ Augusta ejaculated, in her frank, vivacious manner. ‘You wouldn’t object to doing something if the opportunity were presented.’

‘It is my desire,’ said Ebba, ‘if compatible with residence at the extremity of the earth.’

‘Come to me at ten o’clock in the morning, and we’ll see if it can’t be managed.’

The musical buoyancy of Augusta’s voice, as she went on in her enthusiasm, after fascinating, smote Shiel keenly. The

glow of healthful vigour which played about her at every point oppressed him insufferably by its poignant contrast; until at length he leaned forward, if might be, to avoid it, and talked to Handsel about the doings of Glen.

Shiel's behaviour would have excessively annoyed his sister, had not his personal appearance disquieted her. The comely aggressive aspect with which he had left the mountains had wholly deserted him,—only during the last day or two, if Ebba had known it. That supremacy of vision with which he had favoured the universe was utterly extinguished, and there was already a suspicion of that waning glance incident to the self-conscious critic. True, it was veiled still at ordinary moments by the glare of a savage

demand; but a demand it was, too obviously, instead of the arrogant sufficing reserve.

‘*You* went, Shiel?’ cried Ebba, from her place at the table, hearing him talk. ‘Can the little minx sing?’

‘Little doubt about that. I wanted her to come here, but I see you have no piano.’

‘She can come for all that,’ Handsel interposed.

‘Or we can make a party at my rooms,’ said Augusta, with alacrity, causing Shiel to look up to her face.

‘You hardly know how much you propose,’ said he, relaxing into a smile.

‘I shall be glad of the new type,’ was the vivacious reply. ‘I am very catholic in my views.’

‘Glen would require it all.’

Shiel found that he had been contrasting his last night with this, and the result somewhat surprised him. But after this break, he was conscious of an accession of complaisance. Words went now and then from the table to the chairs.

To Augusta, of course, Shiel had proved a source of amazement, so utterly opposed was he to all her literary ideals, as well as to her enthusiastic preconceptions of himself. She had been trusting to some philosophical display, for of her philosophies she could not but at all times speak. But the fortification of her own being had never at any time been her paramount end.

It was his native arrogance which Shiel was striving to quell. He had set forth

confessedly upon the quest of a moment's spiritual recreation ; fired by the desperate attempt to catch one solitary glimpse of the world through these universally laughing eyes. In face of the insignificant music-hall songstress, the confession did not seriously arraign him ; but here it thrust forward all the frustration of his life. Once relinquish the pugnacious attitude of his being, and what was he ? What would he appear in such eyes as those of Augusta ? Shiel was tragically barren of humour, but something in this situation reached him. The affliction of his being was the absence of all seasonable growth. He could know no modification, save from volcanic action. Seed, leaf, branch, and flower were for such as that reticent Handsel, who had been ob-

serving the cataclysmic features before her with such complacent curiosity since their appearance.

However, Shiel did win a measure of victory over himself, and Augusta revived under it. In an innocent moment the latter had let slip a reference to 'the cause,' and Shiel had winced under it.

'What do you mean, Miss Lavington? It is a word I object to.'

Augusta explained, eloquently.

'Excellent, as coming from you, and applying to you,' said he, nodding approbation. She quoted words to impute much of it also to himself.

'But "cause" implies association, pagandism : I detest both.'

'How can anything proceed without both?'

‘I don’t care if nothing does proceed.’

‘But you are a social organizer——’

Shiel leapt up aghast.

‘I? I am the most rabid individualist.
I loathe social organisms.’

Ebba laughed aloud.

‘This is impossible, Mr. Wanless,’ concluded Augusta, with quiet dignity. ‘It is the social thread alone which sustains the universe. If we disown the old enervating bond of sentimentality, what else have we left to us?’

‘But there *can* be no social thread,’ pursued Shiel, more calmly. ‘No two atoms are alike.’

‘Certainly not; but there are the inevitable grounds of meeting.’

‘I have yet to find them.’

‘Find them you will, Mr. Wanless, if

you will forgive me the presumption of saying so,' Augusta said, with considerable seriousness, Shiel's eyes resting immovably upon her. 'Without them, what would there be left to work for? We should each retire into our individual cave, and there gnaw our souls into frenzy. The glory of life would have departed. The stimulating variety of action; the humorous contrasts of civilization.'

Shiel's eyes fell abruptly, and he felt knives all around him. Ebba vociferated approval.

It was not long ere Shiel, upon paltry excuses, left the assembly, and he roamed about the town late into the night.

Ebba's instinct had in no way misled her; how far Augusta would have affected Shiel under his normal circumstances need

not be inquired. As it was, she had swept like an irresistible breeze around him, from that forbidden world into which he was at the moment peering, and the result was a tremulous thrilling of the nerves. Where poor Glen's ecstatic efforts had only wrought an instinctive repulsion, the mere presence of the more refined enthusiasm had kindled a fire. That it had come in the guise of a woman, was no part of the man's perception ; with a savage sarcasm would any such insinuation have been received just now. Nevertheless, from the moment of his leaving her, did that world from which he was debarred assume the subtle delicacies of Augusta's form. He gathered the whole of his faculties into one exclusive gaze, and bent it without fear upon the image of Augusta. It

should yield him the secret, if such were communicable to him, it and none other.

That it was the insignificant Glen, through all her garish vulgarity of the night before, to whom this acquired visionary sense was due,—a perception of ideal contrasts gained from her,—and through whom alone Augusta had so much as come within range of a regard, he could not be expected to recognize. The initial cause was lost; merged, personally extinguished in an impersonal inspiration which worked merely as an abstract force. It was the abstract force which Shiel, as ever, followed.

CHAPTER II.

SHIEL PERPENDS.

THE invitation came from Mrs. Smart, and it was duly accepted : Shiel himself buying his sister an improvised Liberty gown for the occasion. On the Friday evening they went.

Ebba was graciously received by the ladies of the Smart household, and succeeded immediately in creating a personally favourable impression ; personally, because Cuthbert's conversation had al-

ready made them kindly enough through report. Cuthbert himself confined his attention chiefly to Shiel; an easy attitude of dry humour mostly characterising his brief passages with Abb. But Cuthbert was not unobservant, and he felt himself very much at ease: he was not a demonstrative man under any circumstances. In mere conversational ability Ebba chanced to be peculiarly brilliant, and her faculty was stimulated that day by the acquisition of some remunerative work for her pencil. Augusta's offices had served her so far, and life seemed immediately transformed to the eager gaze of the young aspirant.

‘A very sensible young woman,’ said Mrs. Smart, who was always considered old-fashioned.

‘A most stimulating companion,’ said

Miss Cicely, older by several years than Abb; 'and so free from the vulgarity of emancipation affected by clever girls. Her father must be an interesting man.'

And Cuthbert was quite satisfied with the expressions.

Even Shiel did not resent their entertainment, the placid refinement finding some unaccustomed inlet to his moral system. Some of his words surprised Ebba, as they were returning; they had talked of her artistic employment.

'There is no doubt that you will make money, Abb. You will gratify your father's heart and redeem the family.'

'No joking about that matter. You can't enter into the remotest fraction of his feeling. But oh, there is a satisfaction in

doing something definite. Haven't you discovered the need ?'

'I do something definite every day of my life ; but I am deficient in humanity.'

His tone deprecated all thought of irony.

Ebba marvelled at the novel consciousness in him.

'You will get it through literature. You have lately done some admirable writing.'

'Not to order.'

'So I observe. But, if you only write for your own deliverance, the deliverance will be accomplished, and you will awake again to art.'

'Do you know, I wish that I could, Abb ; but I doubt its being possible. The

world is not clothed for me with any familiar personality. I think the death of our mother shattered that. Unless the childish soul is habituated to a restricted universe, that—I suppose—of love—he never used this word willingly—‘a genuine domestic existence,—to some temperaments it cannot come. Brute action sustains many, but failing that you slink naked through the universe . . . And this wide, cold universe none of us is Atlas enough to sustain.’

Ebba saw indeed that some change had come.

‘But art clothes and limits it; tempers the wilderness to the shorn lamb; makes of it a very paradise.’

‘H’m,’ said Shiel, doubtfully. ‘Not religion?’

‘Religion is art, and art is religion,’
was Ebba’s dogmatic paradox.

Shiel left his sister in Montague Street, and proceeded to walk to his own shelter. It was a warm night, and there were such stars visible as appear in the summer sky. The streets were quiet about him, and for the most part deserted. He thought of the hills beneath these same stars, but how much more quiet; how much more thoroughly deserted! And his father there, perhaps still sitting over some folio in his library; perhaps also thinking of him. There was something irresistibly alluring in that desolate seclusion, and he dwelt upon it, looking often to the stars.

Presently he found his lips were audibly muttering:

‘ . . . Great God ! I’d rather be
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn ;
So might I, standing on *that* pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn.’

Words which had hitherto inspired a more or less derisive impatience : viewed more soberly to-night.

In this reflective mood Shiel let himself in to his domicile. It was now late ; all the house was quiet ; his own candle on the hall-table to show that he was last ; so he locked and bolted the door behind him and went to his room. For three days now had this sense of loneliness, of ostracism, weighted him, and it was getting intolerable. His vaunted isolation, once his stay, now, by this inscrutable revolution, his direst curse. And whence the change ? In momentary resentment he invoked the past ; but instantly the

breezy figure of Augusta came sweeping around him, and his hand and brain fell powerless. Again he was alone beneath the stars. He turned to fling himself upon the couch, when in the candle-light his eye fell upon a letter on the table. He took it up and examined it listlessly. The postmark was Morpeth; the writing unrecognized.

‘MY DEAR MR. SHIEL,’ (he ultimately read,) ‘you will pardon my inability to keep silence longer. Since I left you at the Linnburn, and in the face of subsequent circumstances, I have suffered intolerable affliction. I believe my feeling towards my cousin Glen has not been unknown to you,—it therefore will be my sufficient excuse. As I shall be ill if I

sustain it longer, may I beg you to tell me all you know of her terrible disaster, and of her life and whereabouts at this moment. I feel that I must in my inevitable suspicions have wickedly wronged you ; but if it be so, the overpowering circumstances will, I trust, obtain my forgiveness. May I implore you to write to me at once ?

‘ JAMES GILHOLME.’

Shiel read and re-read the brief epistle, then wiped the perspiration from his temples. The next moment he was scanning, with gathered eyebrows, the pages of a ‘ Bradshaw ’: then to his watch. It was after half-past eleven. The last Great Northern train had gone an hour ago : but he could leave Euston at midnight and

reach the north by another route. True, he could not reach his destination thereby any sooner than if he waited for the five o'clock newspaper express the other way ; but five hours' interval ? Could he sleep —read—? He answered himself by leaving the house. In Hampstead Road he found a cab, and got to the station in time enough. For twelve hours ensuing he was being tossed across the country.

This suspicion, natural, nay, inevitable, enough to the commonplace observer, was hardly likely to have occurred to Shiel's transcendent imagination. James's abrupt treatment of him at the burn had not in the least suggested any misinterpretation of his relationship with Glen, but had been attributed solely to the obvious perturbation of the young minister at his own

sentimental reverses. That he, of all men, should be thought guilty of this thing was perhaps the most radical assault upon Shiel's philosophy that a fatuous universe could have invented; but this mere personal resentment, which doubtless some time ago would have formed the very keynote to his emotion, was only a rapidly passing element in it now. The chord was deeper, more elemental than that.

He was at Leeds about six,—a fine morning, and the sun already hot,—and having an hour or two to wait, he had breakfast at an hotel.

James Gilhome, paler and more haggard than ever, was that morning occupied in his room over the weekly sermon. Paper and books were before him, but his face seemed to lack the spiritual afflatus which

commonly characterized him at such time. He had been greatly depressed by the absence of any letter that morning, although elementary calculations had long since assured him that no reply could reach him before Sunday. With a sigh he would bend again to his task, and from his own perplexities try to extract divine truth for the congregation.

It was a relief when his landlady appeared with a white cloth to lay his table. Gladly he gathered up his books and papers, trusting to a fuller measure of inspiration for the evening. He took his stand by the window, looking out upon the unfrequented little street, and acquiescing in the sympathetic garrulity of his hostess.

‘It ’ull come, Mr. Gilholme; it ’ull

come,' said she, able shrewdly to construe his predicament by this time. 'We never had a more acceptable and powerful minister than Mr. Douglas, and he never gave more than half-an-hour to the preparation. From ten o'clock until half-past every Saturday night he just sat in this room with his pipe, and he aye said that the messages floated on the incense of the 'bacco. Those were his words, you ken ; but there was nothing of the Catholics about him.'

'So you have told me, Mrs. Pattie,' submissively responded James.

'He was a good man ; but of course he was nearer to manhood than yoursel'. Dinna be cast down. You have the word. We can a' see that nicely. It 'ull come ; it——'

James had shot past her like a whirlwind, causing this abrupt pause in her reflections, and only satisfying her inevitable astonishment to the extent of 'A visitor, Mrs. Pattie,' muttered as he passed her on his way to the door. He threw this open, and blushed like a girl as he greeted Shiel. The open smile and hand grasp of the latter still further disconcerted James, and he stammered from the depths of his humiliation. They entered the room together, and Shiel was easily persuaded to share the modest meal of the minister.

'Yes, I have travelled all night,' said Shiel, buoyantly, setting himself to counteract the obvious disquietude of his entertainer. 'A glorious journey. It has done me good. Don't think of an apology.'

Undoubtedly the fierce activity had

wrought a change in Shiel. Despite his hurl through the darkness and a restless night, he presented more of his old buoyant self than recent days had seen in him. They partook of the mutton-chops and pudding, talking but of general things, and then Shiel proposed that they should go out. They took the nearest road to the open fields. When quite alone James held forth his hand.

‘ You will forgive me, Mr. Shiel.’

Shiel gripped his hand, and deprecated such tone between them.

‘ I do now see how it has arisen ; but it staggered me at first. Let me tell you everything I know.’

Omitting names, Shiel related in full Glen’s adventures in Oxford, and since, as

well as his own opportune interposition in her affairs. She had shown a child-like, spaniel-like partiality for the hand that had befriended her, undoubtedly, said he ; but that was all.

‘ I myself, James, have a shuddering horror of such sentimental complexities,’ he added, ‘ which we need not go into now, and am hardly likely to fall into holes of that kind. Glen herself can hardly be under a misconception on such a point, for she has read some of my words upon the subject. But do you mind defining to me, if you can, your own attitude in such affairs ?’

A startling proposition to poor James, who could not conscientiously plead even the first chapter of Genesis as his own

monitor in the transaction. Why did not Shiel ask him to analyze the theory of sight, touch, or hearing?

‘ I don’t fully—how—how do you mean, Mr. Shiel ?’

‘ You fall in love, for instance ; you ask in marriage ?’

‘ Certainly,’ assented James, gathering courage. ‘ Is any human being perfect without it ? It is to me one of the divine ordinances of God.’

The minister blushed again at the bold enunciation of this broad, sheltering principle, conscious of its anxious adoption after the fact. But now it gathered vividness for him, and it was something to cling to.

‘ Is it for your own consolation,’ pursued

Shiel, mercilessly, ‘or for that of the new souls that may spring from it?’

‘Really—I—I have not examined myself upon the matter,’ stammered James, honesty getting the upper hand.

‘Exactly. But if you had, would your conclusion be something like this? God has placed an instinct in your nature without the acknowledgment of which you yourself would not be complete.’

‘Yes, yes.’

‘Good, as regards yourself. Well, now, suppose you could know as a positive fact that the children resulting from this completion were doomed to be the most wretched objects in creation, would that reconcile you to the fact of remaining incomplete?’

‘No, it would not,’ asserted James, after a brief silence. Shiel glanced surprise. ‘It would not, Mr. Shiel, and for this reason. Their wretchedness could be through no act of mine.’

‘But you would be their father.’

‘Undoubtedly, but their wretchedness could not result from that.’

‘They would not have been wretched if they had never lived.’

‘Mr. Shiel, I dare not hold such an argument. It strikes at the very throne of God. He does not make us to be wretched. That only comes from our own misdeeds.’

‘Or those of our father. You recollect, “unto the third and fourth generation,” James?’

‘Certainly I do,’ asserted James, waking to a sense of his responsibility now that he was inured to the discussion. ‘But that is no warrant for my judging the ways of God. I accept them, Mr. Shiel, without question; certain that they are good. We are but the stewards of His world, and are here to carry out our master’s orders. If every soldier put his own judgment in place of that of the general, would any battle be won? What is *our* vision in respect of the whole universe? *Our* judgment in respect of the God that made us? Surely it is blasphemous to think that *we* can govern the world by putting our own vain schemes in place of His that formed it?’

Shiel was conscious of a singular toler-

ation for his friend's elementary theology. It is more than possible that he envied it. They both went on for some distance in silence.

‘Then you love Glen still?’ asked Shiel, unexpectedly.

‘I do, and shall always.’

‘She now needs love the more,’ pursued James, construing in his own way his companion's silence. ‘What began as a mere pleasant fancy, becomes now both a pleasure and a duty.’

Now that the bonds were once broken, James found a definite relief in speaking.

‘But if she rejects your love?’

‘I shall be patient. We are both very young.’

If for a moment Shiel saw ignobility in such submissiveness, he quickly dispelled

the perception. He was in a mood to discern another side to it, and that could inspire unfamiliar reflections. What a world the sentimental minister had made of it!

But James was not a philosopher, save by virtue of the meeting of extremes; and, beyond the solid ground of his elementary disclosure, he could give no reason for the faith that was his. To him the world as created was a definite cosmos, and an examination of the springs the most flagitious of high treason. But an ingenuous faith has a cogency of its own even to a sophisticated reason, and Shiel did not find his errand without effect. No persuasion, however, could detain him, and that same afternoon he returned.

‘You see Glen sometimes?’ hazarded James, as they stood upon the platform.

‘Sometimes.’

‘Then I live in firmer comfort. Your influence must have weight.’

‘Unfortunately I cannot think so.’

‘But it must, Mr. Shiel; at any rate, you will make it?’

‘She resents interference . . . But Handsel and I will try.’

‘And poor Handsel . . . is there any fear—do you think——’

Shiel could not but laugh.

‘Never add her to your burdens, my dear James. She is stauncher than any one of us.’

The minister watched the train depart, and then walked for two hours. That evening he was to excogitate such a discourse as his flock had not been hitherto led to expect. His topic was ‘The will of God.’

Shiel pondered his friend's disclosure as he sped onwards in the train. The mere worldly dismissal of the point with commiserating contempt was not just now enough for him; ideals having assumed an unprecedented interest in his eyes. He sought rather for the subtler source whence the marvellous effluence could issue, with a view perhaps—for he was young—to an appropriation of the waters. This love that they spoke about—that too was a relaxation; an exclusive personal possession, in face of which all surrounding realities became as the flimsiest chimeras. It was passing strange. That the soul could so build a wall unto itself, and so hem itself in from all the chaotic influences without, and assure itself that it had dimensions! That this and this might it

do; that this and this was its duty. It was strange.

Shiel fell to sleep in revolving it, and dreamed strange dreams.

CHAPTER III.

RECREATION.

ON the following Monday night there was a small assembly in Miss Lavington's rooms. The ostensible object of the meeting being to hear Glen sing, that young lady formed the central point of interest; to her own satisfaction, no doubt, and certainly much to the furtherance of her picturesque development. It was admitted, however, that she had accommodated herself to the cultivated surroundings astonishingly.

There was an air of intellect and refinement about the lady journalist's apartment—influences to which even Glen was to some extent susceptible. *Æsthetic* upholstery of an airy nature gave the room its distinctive tone, whilst scattered about in careless profusion were sundry books and periodicals of current report. A substantial case of works of reference and classic authors was on one wall, all other available space being given over to pictures—reproductions of well-known specimens of artistic excellence. And the fair hostess herself was an incarnation of the whole.

The situation was a novel one for Shiel; but the business-like atmosphere of the room, as well as the masculine tone adopted by Miss Lavington and his sister, prevented his feeling in any way ridiculous.

Indeed, as soon as he was fairly established there, the pleasing indeterminate suggestion of healthful breezy enlightenment, which Augusta's presence alone had previously imparted, encircled him again, but now with redoubled distinctness and intensity. His whole manner betrayed the exceptional complacency,—a manifestation not likely to escape the alert glance of Ebba as she and her brother scrutinized the walls. With kind and delicate tact the hostess's first attentions were devoted to the spiritual repose of the two less sophisticated members of her company, and she produced for them such light and attractive material as she deemed likeliest to assist her in the task. Soon all felt very much at their ease.

The recent episode into which James

Gilholme had drawn the impetuous Shiel had materially modified the latter's manner of regarding Glen. It could not be said to have aroused him to the common-sense outlook of a mere ordinary mortal, but it had somewhat curbed his unreasoning impulse to make direct use of this girl's accomplishments as an instigation to diversion in himself. He could not but be conscious of the frame of mind in which Glen had to-night come here. It was of course a solution to her of his expressed desire to hear her sing to himself, and for his own exclusive spiritual behoof. Her very first glance at him had disclosed thus much. That, in fact, Shiel had brought her here with some quite different intention she could not be blamed for not instinctively perceiving. Resolute in a very

definite course of conduct herself, and hourly intent upon the promotion of that one course alone, she could hardly be expected to discern the significance of all the saltatory flings and bounds of so complex an organization as Shiel's. He had appealed to *her* to make him laugh, to make him really enjoy something; how could she know that since that interview, but a few days old, a whole cycle had revolved in his vehement consciousness? that he had been introduced, as by a lightning flash, to the breezier altitudes of Augusta's world, and again to the gloomier depths of James Gilholme's?

Commonplace jealousy, however, could ere long teach Glen much. It was not difficult for her to observe the attitude of Shiel to Miss Lavington for instance, when

the two engaged in any animated conversation. Too well she knew that such countenance had never been extended to herself. Intellectual distinctions Glen could not easily draw; would no doubt have strenuously resented their introduction into matters of sex. Perhaps her experiences had contributed to this condition quite as much as her limited faculties. Of course, that there were matters other than sexual between a man and a woman could hardly have suggested itself to her. Augusta therefore had thus early declared herself her foe. Glen measured herself with her, and in essentials by no means to her own disparagement. She had, effectually as she did not doubt, contested her cousin

Handsel, and she would contest again. In this mood Glen went to sing.

The girl's voice was distinctly a good one, though wholly untrained. The first selection being left to herself, she produced 'Birds of Twilight,' Miss Lavington heroically playing the accompaniment. Handsel had an opportunity of noting the interchange of glances between Shiel and his sister as the song proceeded; Ebba indeed on one occasion including her in the unspoken converse. Nobody wept, and it is certain that Glen confessed to some measure of chagrin at the cold-blooded inquest which at the close sat upon her efforts, with the mere intention of gauging the capabilities of her voice! Encouragement and appreciation were meant to be

warm, but a single tear would have outweighed the most generous intentions. Glen was at length so irrepressibly annoyed, that she looked up with ill-concealed irritation whilst Augusta spoke, and shot a glance at the unwarrantably complacent Shiel.

‘Can you not enjoy *that* more, Mr. Shiel?’ she exclaimed, with a nervous quiver of her lip, and a sparkling eye, as though flinging a deliberate defiance to the whole of the company by means of her private allusion.

‘It is certainly an advance on the “Star,”’ was the imperturbable reply.

Glen only bit her lip, but the others caught up the conversation, and parried anything of a more personal nature.

But as the talk flowed, Handsel could

not keep her eyes from her cousin. The latter had assumed such an attitude of artless aggression as to irritate the undemonstrative observer, and no doubt to some extent to scandalize her more cultivated instincts. It ultimately led her to snatch a moment to attempt a very necessary rescue.

‘What are you making yourself such a little fool for?’ she demanded, in an undertone of anger. ‘Do you think you’ll give *him* pleasure by doing it? He’ll go in a minute if you don’t alter.’

‘Do you think so?’ stammered Glen, opening her eyes widely.

But the hint proved sufficient.

Thereafter Glen showed a remarkable submissiveness to criticism, and was content to try for the behoof of the company

all manner of accredited Scottish songs, to herself more or less hymn-like. To her amazement her compliance received inexpressible reward. Shiel appeared to unbend immediately, and to extend to herself the countenance which she had seen given to another with despair. This too was noted of Handsel.

But Glen's suffering was by no means over. From a complacent talk with herself, Shiel turned abruptly away and addressed Augusta, where she was speaking with his sister.

‘You too will submit to the ordeal, Miss Lavington?’

‘Oh, by all means,’ laughed she, and sat down immediately to the keys.

Without need of notes or words, the young lady sang from the dainty riches

of *Iolanthe*, in characteristic breezy fashion.

Whatever Shiel had felt before, the present sensation was wholly new to him. He found himself carried away into realms that he had never visited, in which he felt afraid to draw his breath. His eyes were fixed in scarce conscious intensity upon the back of Augusta's head, and the exquisite curves of her neck and shoulders, whilst her voice electrified him. For the moment self-analysis was wholly lost in a novel regenerative transport which defied the subjective shades. A marked reticence characterised his behaviour for the rest of the time, which contrasted oddly with his unrestrained conduct hitherto. But Ebba displayed skilful manipulation both of him and of the company.

At half-past nine Miss Lavington, rising from her chair, put her finger upon a clock on the mantel-piece, and uncere- moniously bade them disperse, as she had two hours' work to do. The abrupt dismissal was received with hilarious obedience, and they forthwith broke up.

It was but a few minutes' walk to Montague Street, whither the four visitors proceeded in company. Doggedly resisting all persuasion to go in, Shiel expressed his intention of accompanying Glen home, to the no small flutter of one particular bosom. They parted, but before the house-door had closed Shiel was once more beside it. Ebba put forth her head.

‘I have seen James,’ he said, ‘and have something to tell her.’

His sister nodded intelligently, and he went after his companion.

They turned up Gower Street, but for some distance neither spoke. To say truth, Shiel was endeavouring to reduce his dazzling experience to immediate practical requirements. He would of course have reviled the imputation of having himself fallen in love with Augusta; but at the same time he did not hesitate to admit that he had that night received some remarkable elucidatory comment upon the problem of James Gilholme and Glen. He could distinguish somewhere on the glittering horizon the cosmos of which poor James had tried to speak, and which he himself had been genuinely anxious to investigate. Strange to say, it inspired him with an exceptional amount of for-

bearance, not vituperation, for the sentimental minister. It might after all, at any rate, be a definite conception, this which crippled the world ; suppose it were, merely for the sake of James, whose gaunt visage appeared at this moment very vividly to his eye.

‘ You have enjoyed it, Mr. Shiel ? ’ asked Glen at length, weary of the protracted silence.

‘ Yes, I have,’ he said, absently, not thinking of the word she had used.

‘ You really have ? ’

‘ Have what ? What did you ask ? . . . Why, yes, I believe I have ; ’ and he laughed mildly.

‘ But not my singing,’ was her ingenuous comment.

‘ Yes, your singing . . . But, Glen, you

had better live with your cousin. She will be quite alone when my sister goes in a day or two; and you——’

‘ With Handsel ?’

‘ Certainly,—why not ?’

‘ She would want me to sing hymns all day. I am quite comfortable where I am, thank you.’

‘ But how long do you mean to go on living like this ?’

‘ Oh, as long as I like it, or until anything else happens. I am very well contented.’

‘ You must know that it is not a life for a girl who cares anything about her character, or who has anybody to care about it for her.’

‘ I would never do anything wrong,’ exclaimed she, hotly. ‘ You said yourself,

Mr. Shiel, that you thought no worse of me for what's over——'

'Very likely. But do you suppose you are improving yourself in any possible way by the kind of existence you are leading here?'

'Who cares whether I am or no?'

'Many do ; but one especially, to whom every moment of your life is a thousand times more precious than all the years of his own. One who would like to see you living in a way that would bring yourself more solid satisfaction, and him more peace of mind at the prospect before you.'

Shiel permitted himself an unusual warmth of utterance in this singular line of pleading, and Glen found her heart palpitating madly at the startling turn

that things were taking. She could not immediately say anything.

‘Is it nothing to you in this cold, heartless world that there is a man who, in spite of everything that has gone before, still clings to your image as the only light of his life, and who is longing to make your life more—more happy than you yourself can ever possibly make it. Is this nothing to you?’

Glen faltered a negative, all her frame in a too blissful ecstasy to permit of coherent articulation.

‘Then why do you behave as if it was? Why do you allow him to think that you spurn his affection?’

‘I never meant to. I never knew till now that he felt all this.’

‘You must have done,’ said Shiel, firmly.

‘Indeed, I didn’t; I daredn’t. What can I do for him?’

‘Write and ask him.’

‘I would rather hear him tell me.’

‘Then go and see him. Or shall I ask him to——’

A cold shudder ran throughout Glen’s system; a horrid revulsion of feeling bred of the sudden fear that she had been hugging a deception.

‘But who is it?’ she asked, standing still to look at him in the gaslight.

‘You know—James Gilholme.’

For an instant Glen could have shrieked in her maddening agony,—indeed, only by a very positive effort did she restrain herself from doing so. But she was able to spend the impulse in a vehement ‘He!’ and then, mouth and eyebrows wrinkling,

like a child she burst into tears. Shiel, ignorant of the passionate tension incident to such nerves as Glen's, was simply astounded by this result of his disinterested endeavour. He went on in mute bewilderment. Conversation was effectually shattered for that night.

But it was not of this that Shiel mused as he sat unoccupied in his chair through the night hours. It was the spectre of himself that rose in grim irony before him there. Although his experiences that evening had undoubtedly given him the necessary flash whereby to plead so definitely the sentimental cause, there was as yet nothing whatever personal in his perception of it. So ingenuously was this so, that no remotest thought of involuntary hostages to an unkind universe for an

instant assailed him, wherein the whole contest must inevitably have centred had he been conscious of the smallest inclination towards the womanly charms of Augusta as such. It was only a still deeper movement of the subjective waters that was engaging him. He knew that he *enjoyed* the presence of Augusta; that something subtly magic in her mere manner of speaking, her movements, above all her song, could give him a powerful sensation to which he had been utterly a stranger hitherto. Whilst he experienced it he knew that the world and its mysteries grew less than nothing about him, that the momentary experience was all-excluding.

In recalling it now, and really trying to gather what vital significance it might have for himself, he came gradually upon

the knowledge of an altered regard for the world of endeavour. The toiling hive in all its multiplicity of sordid strife passed more distinctly before him, and presented a less intolerable spectacle. He found patience to look at it more coherently,—then to examine his own position in the throng. Was his savage repudiation of it tenable? A surging instinct seemed to hint it was. But it had produced a Miss Lavington undeniably. Her enthusiastic plea for labour, as the pivot of the world, still clung about him. Had not even Cuddie Smart bade him ‘Try the stones,’—if he would not have the rectory. This rectory again. A man *might* deliver his soul that way. What seclusion was possible he knew from the instance of his father. He knew this rectory as one of

the undercurrents of the past few days. But the man destined for the church at Oxford? The comparison was not exhilarating to certain of Shiel's instincts. How would it seem to Augusta? he wondered.

For the next day or two Shiel simply ruminated in the privacy of his lodgings. His pride shrank from the display of his morbid humour even in the park or on Primrose Hill. Then he got a note from his sister, simply saying that she was to leave King's Cross by such-and-such train. He was there to see her.

Ebba now flaunted all the buoyancy of her new acquaintance. How simply things had been solved for her, Shiel could not but regard with envy. But then she had ever been more or less superficial; that

he had always suspected. All the better for her was now his irresistible comment. His last impression of her presented an excited figure waving him farewell as it rose airily into unclouded space. When he turned away he was alone with Handsel, and as they walked forward he looked twice at her. Yes, surely, it was a tear, for it had rolled down her cheek. Shiel was too amazed to speak. But for the first time he thought of Handsel as of a definite human being. When they talked, only indifferent matters engaged them; until at length Shiel became more personal.

‘Have you formed any plans, Handsel?’ he asked; it might have been thought more or less ironically.

‘Certainly I have. I formed those before I came here.’

The unexpected decisiveness took him by surprise.

‘You mean you came here for a definite purpose?’

‘Certainly.’

The girl laughed this time, so naïvely unguarded was the tone he used.

‘To settle the universe, I suppose?’

‘Hardly,’ was Handsel’s dry answer. ‘I concern myself with things a little lower down.’

‘For instance?’

‘I am going to have a year or two’s study of what there is to be learned here.’

‘But doesn’t it all lead to what I say?’

‘I don’t think it. What is the universe to me? I don’t know anything about it.’

‘Some people wish to,’ said Shiel, warmly.

‘More fools they. They had better run their heads against Tam Tallon’s Crag. They’ll have to take it as they find it at last.’

The man burst into hearty laughter.

‘By Jove! my lass, you are a genuine philosopher. Unfortunately the universe is not so simple a matter to everyone. It has a little complication in it.’

‘By putting it there to see. Nothing is complicated until you pull it to pieces.’

‘You are unanswerable, Handsel. But I think one may have a little curiosity in a watch although one can’t make one.’

‘Have as much curiosity as you like; but don’t unscrew the wheels. It is only

children that aye want to be pulling things to bits, and then they cry when they've broken them.'

In this bit of converse Handsel could not resist the joy of some unrestrained vernacular. Shiel lost his hilarity under it, and went forward for some minutes in silent introspection. Everybody he encountered had some refuge from these spectres, he alone was cursed. But even he had experienced one momentary respite. Might he not seek for more?

As he pondered, he paid no heed to his companion's face, else he might have suspected her sincerity. There was from time to time a nervous uncertainty about her lips, wholly unnatural to her who was resolutely made. At length Handsel conquered, and the words came forth.

‘ You have asked me a question, Mr. Shiel, may I ask you one?’

‘ I should indeed be unreasonable otherwise.’

‘ Can you not see that my cousin Glen is over-attentive to you?’

Handsel herself blushed at the announcement which she had for some days been determined to make to him. He only looked up.

‘ Do you think so?’ he said, enunciating the words slowly.

‘ There can be no doubt about it,’—his obtuseness was in danger of angering her.

‘ You ought not to see her.’

‘ Do you mean to say the world has got to that?’ he asked, emphatically. ‘ Can’t civilized people—— Do you mean that *she* thinks——?’

A flash of enlightenment shot through the man's mind, and he stopped.

‘You know what a little fool she is. Common kindness she can't understand.’

‘But your brother James is in love with her. He has asked me to see her sometimes. Surely the girl cannot think that I am such a scoundrel, such an imbecile ruffian——’

‘She can think anything, I tell you . . . But is that poor lad still so misguided? You're thinking of the past, Mr. Shiel.’

‘Not a week ago I saw him. Not here; in the north.’

‘You don't approve of it?’ asked Shiel, in face of her resolute silence.

‘It simply passes my comprehension, that's all.’

‘Yes, yes, and mine; but the fact is

not altered. You will not abandon her, Handsel ?’

‘ It doesn’t lie with me. I will do everything that I am allowed to do.’

‘ Would you have her to live with you ?’

‘ She wouldn’t do it. I will try.’

‘ Well, good-bye. I suppose the delightful ordinances of reason forbid me also to see you ?’

He looked into her face as he spoke, and, coupling it with the glimpse at the station, thought her remarkably altered. It was only that he had never seen her as a woman before ; all the change was in himself. She returned his glance composedly, presenting a placid countenance of great native dignity and refinement, despite the homely buffets of the mountain wind.

‘That is all with yourself, Mr. Shiel.’

‘Thank you for that, my lass,’ said he, giving her hand an honest grip. ‘For heaven’s sake, don’t let *us* be idiots. You are at the same address?’

‘For a day or two. You shall have the new one.’

That evening Shiel found himself in the vicinity of Bloomsbury. For an hour or two before coming out he had been endeavouring to resume his literary labours, under an imaginative impulse which had unexpectedly come to him. Nothing, however, had resulted from it; the few works accomplished being as speedily destroyed. Then he had wandered forth, vaguely aspiring.

It was hardly with coherent determination that he turned the corner of Augusta's street. When he had done so he was conscious of a trifling irregularity of the pulse as he swept the pavement. Only one passenger was visible, and that a man. Unconcernedly he went forward, barely glancing at 29. Upon reaching the extremity, debouching on a square, he stood to read the public lettering on a pillar-box. Then he less resolutely retraced his steps.

Shiel made no pretence to efficiency in conventional usage, but he did just now suspect something unusual in the project to which he felt inclined. But the circumstances surely were unusual, and his new friend—— Once more he had passed

the door of 29, but he turned abruptly. Let the fates decide. So he went up and rang the bell.

The maid, referring to an indicator in the hall, announced Miss Lavington at home. So Shiel was admitted.

Upon entering to the fair journalist he felt somewhat less at ease. She sat scribbling at a table, but the instant he appeared in the doorway she leapt up and greeted him breezily.

‘Mr. Wanless, this is good of you, indeed.’

‘Very barbarian rather. You must forgive me,’ smiled he, releasing her hand and taking the chair which she indicated. ‘And busy too.’

‘The sorriest trash, Carlyle would call it. I am sorry to say that I am given to trash.’

‘I wish you would teach me.’

‘Oh, you are too unkind. They want me to use a type-writer,’—he had glanced at the sprinkled sheets, as she threw her comely person back in the chair and combed the tresses on her temples with her delicate fingers—‘and I refuse point-blank. It is degrading. We are machines enough without that. Don’t you think so?’

‘The mere suggestion is appalling. But I mustn’t interrupt you. I only called in passing to beg the Björnsen.’

‘Please, a quarter-of-an-hour,’ and she pointed to the dial. ‘Don’t you work at all in the evening?’

‘When I can ; but unfortunately I can’t learn to be a machine.’

Augusta threw one of her swift glances

upon him to detect the playful sarcasm, but his countenance did not sustain the suggestion. At the moment she thought it a trifle pathetic.

‘The higher imaginations can’t,’ and she lowered her eyes.

When she raised them his were upon her.

‘Can you enlighten me?’

‘I?’ laughed she. ‘I should hardly presume to try. A mere shop-keeper. It is simply a matter of grade.’

‘Rather of competence, I fear. Don’t you think the genuine egoist the most contemptible of mortals? . . . You must.’

His eye travelled round her chamber as he asked it, as though that had prompted the question.

‘It is rather a wide inquiry,’ returned

she, sustaining the jocular. 'Who isn't an egoist?'

'Let me say yourself, for instance.'

'You would be very bold.'

'But you see something tangible about you. You can brandish a weapon in assertion of existence. You are marshall-ing womanhood,' added he, turning off the threatened fervour by an easy smile.

'How I wish I were! . . . That there is something glorious in existence, undoubtedly I hold. A paltry optimist, I suppose. But don't the very problems that assail us justify the war? Existence is good, Mr. Wanless; not *whatever* is, mind. Five-sixths of *that* is very wrong and gross; but why? Not by the nature of things. No, a million times! Merely through a grossly material wave which

threatens mankind at all times, but which only now and then breaks and swamps them. Have no fear, it does not drown us. After we have thrust our drenched locks from our eyes, we are all the more vigorous for our ducking.'

'Go on, please,' said Shiel, inhaling with marked solemnity the characteristic breeze.

'You don't think so? You lay the axe to the root of the tree. I had hoped not.'

'What a thing it is to have a cause in the brain.'

'And yet it is not a cause, mind, but an effect,' laughed Augusta.

Shiel got up, although the clock permitted him yet several minutes.

'May I have the Björnsen?'

'With great pleasure.'

Thrusting the book into his pocket, Shiel took his leave.

Miss Lavington's intercourse with her ideal philosopher, even before this, had been quite enough to disillusion her. About whatever she had read of his there had always appeared such a trenchant vigour; an aggressive unconventionality which, despite the latent pessimism, had been able to stimulate even herself. It was the reconciliation of the antagonistic impressions which for a few minutes occupied her as she sat nibbling her pen alone. In person the man was positively ineffectual, inept,—so, impatiently, she flung to work, and soon the pen whistled over the paper.

Shiel, in the meantime, wandered circuitously home. Perhaps he had had

some vague aspiration towards a repetition of that exhilarating song, and found himself disappointed. The lady's personality he admitted more fascinating than ever, but it had not imparted that previous imaginative glow. At first he was undoubtedly depressed.

But gradually her attitude to her work exercised a subtle influence over him. It was a small matter that that was the very attitude of his most vehement vituperation but a few weeks ago; of that he was now not often conscious: never, in regard to this particular worker. Between then and now was a great gulf fixed. She could laugh, and no doubt sing, during the very progress of her labours: when in his most productive days had he ever been guilty of such hilarity? This led

him to the once more investigation of his own work. He had worked strenuously, but had he ever taken a moment's pleasure in his work? 'Ploughing and harrowing your own soul,' Cuddie had aptly put it: and Shiel now recalled the words. 'Try the stones for a change.' He had been trying everything but the stones; with little result as yet, he had to admit. Metaphorically, Augusta was at the stones, and laughed there. He would try them, and begin that night.

The man was under the impression that he could write. Many things hitherto had supported the impression. His sister had told him that he would get back to art: back he would go, although he was not conscious of ever before having been there. He would forthwith write a story,

a more or less light and pleasant one. The mere effort would aid him, even if the result were not at first wholly satisfactory. It would draw him from himself: would presumably supply 'the stones.'

The suggestion once clutched, it was remarkable how rapidly it expanded. He became more and more deeply absorbed, and soon evolved a centre for his efforts. Quite a short tale had been the original suggestion, on the model of all his previous magazine papers; but he was soon obliged to relinquish this. In the exuberance of his fancy, scene after scene was presented to him, so that he found it necessary to enlarge it to a volume. Crises and catastrophes assailed him in such overwhelming abundance that he felt even then the difficulty to lie in selection.

In this creative preoccupation he threaded the streets, oblivious of everything about him. The sun had already set, and the summer twilight was insinuating itself between the houses, but to anybody alert human figures were sufficiently distinguishable. Shiel had left Hampstead Road, and was traversing the streets and corners of his domiciliary neighbourhood, where the mere scarcity of passengers seemed to obtrude their individuality, but still he paid no heed to the footsteps as they approached him. Turning into his own street, therefore, he was not likely to observe a silent figure standing at the opposite corner. A girl was there, who crossed quickly over at seeing him pass. Another moment, and she would have been away and missed him, for the sun

had not set when she first arrived and her time for watching was all but over.

She followed the unsuspecting Shiel nimbly, at each lamp-post getting as close to him as she dared, but he never turned, or otherwise by the slightest movement showed any consciousness of another's presence. He reached his door, went up to it; she stood on the pavement, coughed, saw him throw a heedless glance towards her, and then disappear within. She bit her lip, ran down the street, and wept.

Through the whole of that summer night Shiel sat at his table and wrote, and soon after the sun had risen he went out.

CHAPTER IV.

EBBA'S DREAM.

‘I sit by my open window,’ wrote Ebba, to her new friend Augusta, the morning after her arrival at Linnbrig, ‘and dream of your remarkable world rolling on at the back of Dunmore yonder, my glimpse of which already seems to have comfortably retreated to that part of my brain where lurk rocs, genii, seven-league boots, and charcoal-burners of the German forests. And how inexpressively divine

this silence seems to me! Fancy (if you can) the breath of morning air coming in to me, and carrying with it nothing but the fragrance of the heath and bog-myrtle, and that golden patch of gorse which illumines the hill-side opposite. There was literally no sound except the water, until a shepherd came along with a flock of sheep from the hills; and now as they pass our gate the air is filled with the dog's bark, the man's vernacular instructions, the bleating and the confused foot-falls of the sheep. And high sunlight everywhere. The scene might induce a strain of my brother in me, but that I am curbed by a nicer (grosser, of course, according to him) sense of proportion.'

Much else in the same strain Ebba was writing,—for her heart was full, and her

imagination inordinately active after her late experiences,—and she interspersed her enthusiastic poetical periods with numerous unexpressed reveries just as ardent. Her brief sojourn in the town had revolutionized the whole of life for her, and she could look out upon its pageant now with a glow of youthful idealism, such as her maiden years hitherto had never brought. What she had frequently felt to be the burden of her isolation here,—the incompatible negation of her enterprising impulses from within,—became now but an imaginative stimulus of superabundant force, revealing fields of illimitable extent for her energetic disporting henceforth. She had waded far with her brother, and had sounded many depths, but in all the sloughs of

their adventures, wherein he had been immersed, she had ever preserved a certain buoyancy ; a characteristic never failing to elicit Shiel's direst wrath. It was this vital spark which measured the radical difference between them ; a personal sun in whose beams lay all the light and shade of comedy and fact ; and in whose eclipse lurked ' gorgons, and hydras, and chimeras dire.'

' To attempt to reveal to you the effect of your kindness would be, in the words of a familiar authority, a symptom of rank lunacy, therefore that I leave untouched. Enough to say that I am born again ; that I have received a new and irresistible gloss upon that most barefaced of modern paradoxes,

" God's in His heaven,—
All's right with the world."

It comes now as a gospel to me. The only cloud amidst all this sunshine is the health of my father. Him I find far from well, although he pugnaciously asseverates that he ails nothing. I fear he does not get over his handling of Shiel. Oddly enough he at this moment appears upon the lawn. Yes, he looks strangely older. I must go . . .'

Ebba flung down her pen and watched her father from the window. Never particularly emphatic in her emotions, she was surprised to find how his figure now affected her. Another result doubtless of her exuberant condition. Until the closing scene with her brother, she had inevitably taken the reticent clergyman very much as a matter of course; even that experience could but inspire her with

a mitigated form of sympathy. In her scrutiny of him now there was something poignant; the sunshine emphasized it, for it had not been so distinct the day before. There was something intolerably pathetic in his appearance there, walking unobserved, and throwing his solitary shadow on the grass. Ebba quickly joined him.

Mr. Wanless was by no means an easy man to manipulate, as nobody knew better than his daughter; and it was more than probable that any immediate display of unrequested sympathy or commiseration might have the very opposite effect of that intended. Therefore Ebba took up quite independent themes, but took care to touch them with subtle fingers. She had irritated him on the score of his health before she had been half-an-hour in his

presence, and was not likely to repeat the indiscretion. But even under the altered method, the vicar did not expand. It was by no means a matter of certainty to Ebba that her return was a source of unalloyed satisfaction to him. The manner in which he had dispatched her had never been forgotten; the first display she thought ever detected by her of an actual readiness to be delivered from her company.

Development of the activity and resources of the reading-room of the British Museum was able to excite his interest for a space, but it proved an evanescent spark, which even the young lady's tact was unable to fan into a flame of any proportions. After this and several similar failures, at a favourable opportunity Ebba

escaped, and the face of Mr. Wanless resumed its wonted aspect of resignation and gloom.

In the evening the clergyman withdrew to his library, and as no invitation was extended to his daughter to join him there, she repaired to her own chamber, and applied herself rigorously to the application of her now modestly remunerative pencil. She had got two children's books to illustrate, and although the letterpress hardly reached the intellectual level to which Ebba was habituated, she did not scorn to lavish upon the indifferent material such wealth of imaginative resources as lay at her command. Her theory was, that the work itself could not be ignoble unless ignobly done, and she knew that by every effort of her art she

made definite progress in it. In this creed she toiled, and she found an ever increasing stimulus in the resolute exertion.

When the maid came to summon her to the final meal at about nine o'clock, Ebba called her in.

‘Shut the door, Jeanie, will you? Has my father been ill at all during my absence?’

‘No, miss; nothing different . . . Bothered, that’s all.’

‘Has he ever said what bothered him.’

‘Never a word.’

‘You are perfectly sure of this?’ said Ebba, emphatically, seeming to misconstrue the girl’s behaviour.

‘I am sure, miss, that he has never said a word of what has bothered him.’

‘Very good. Tell him not to wait for me; and bring me some bread and butter and milk here, please.’

Jeanie withdrew, and Ebba turned again to her paper.

She worked on, regardless of time. She heard the girl go along the passage on her way to bed, and then all the house was still. About half-an-hour later a door opened and was shut below, and the slippered footsteps of the clergyman came silently up the stairs. By Ebba’s door they paused, and there was a light knock.

‘Good-night, Abb.’

The door was immediately opened from within, and Mr. Wanless stepped inside. He looked uneasily about him, as though the room was strange to him.

‘It is getting late,’ he said, ‘what are you doing?’

Ebba pointed complacently to her table.

‘I have got some drawing to do for a publisher. It interests me, and I get absorbed in it ; but I shall not be long.’

This was her first announcement of what had been of such vital import to herself. Her father simply moved his eyebrows, and offered her the formal kiss. Ebba returned it in the same kind, and they parted.

For a short time when alone the girl pondered, unable, it seemed, to resume her interrupted employment. Ultimately she tried a line or two, but, not satisfied, put it all away, and brought out her unfinished letter.

‘It is a singular, if distressing, phe-

nomenon,' she wrote, 'this of inherent loneliness. (I am finishing off now, near midnight, and not in the morning sun, you observe). My glimpse of you and all your surroundings has emphasized this as so many other things taken as matters of course before. The thought arises in connection with my father, who has this moment left me, and whose appalling reticence has now for the first time adequately impressed me. You must know him, for your opinion would be of great assistance to me. Let, therefore, this exercise in psychology offer more substantial inducements to you than our homely pastoral concerns might afford. Come when you can.

'I perceive this innate inexpressiveness to be at the core of my brother Shiel. It

would disturb me to think of his development into anything such as *this*, therefore I do not hesitate to beg you to endure, if it be possible, some measure of intercourse with him. He deigned to utter distinct approval of your life and work, and I think it not at all improbable that even he himself may, through the convenient medium of Handsel, prove anxious to retain an acquaintance with you. Believe me that, graduate at Oxford though he be, and accepted writer of magazine papers, he is utterly alone, and wholly uncivilized. No education has ever reached him; he is as untrimmed as a crag of our "whunstane" rocks here. I write thus plainly because I know you cannot misunderstand my words. This figure of my father haunts me now, and holds up an

admonitory finger in the direction of my unfortunate brother. But he is young, and may, I think, yet be tamed.

‘Of your charges, Handsel and Glen, I need not speak, as I know that they, by virtue of their exploits, form part of your personal troop. Would I were with you, my dear friend!’ . . .

For two or three days Ebba devoted herself so exclusively to her artistic labours that she found no opportunity of a closer inspection of her father. Every moment was passed in her private room, and by her direction many of her meals were taken to her there. By casual observation from her window, she thought that the clergyman passed more of his time than previously in the garden (unemployed for the most part), but the June

sunshine seemed sufficient reason for it. If any further thought came to her in the connection, it would only be by way of satisfaction at the effect such course might have upon his health. In the evenings he shut himself up in his library, as he had ever done. From there each night Ebba heard him ascend the stairs, with the same soft, slow tread, and after the usual formal kiss he retired.

On the third night after her return, when this formality had been enacted, and the young enthusiast remained at work, she found occasion for a book from the shelves below. Fastidious as Mr. Wanless was in the matter of his volumes, from infancy his two children, having been stringently instructed in the method of handling a book, had had free access

to his collection at all times, and they had been in the constant habit of availing themselves of this freedom. Ebba took a candle, therefore, and went downstairs. She found the library door was locked, and, looking to turn the key, saw that it had been taken. The fact for an instant surprised her, but although not hitherto habitual, knowing her father's temperament, that he should have taken to this was not especially astonishing. She could wait until the morrow, so, returning to her room, she thought no more about it. In the silence of the night she resumed her labours.

The house had ever been a particularly silent one, even when there were two young children there; but at least, to the inmates themselves, there had never been

anything gloomy about it. Intellectual vitality had in all of them effectually taken the place of the more ordinary domestic diversions, without any consciousness of especial deprivation. But to-night, as Ebba returned to her solitary chamber, she became aware of a chill sense of melancholy pervading the atmosphere. Now that it so definitely asserted itself, it seemed to her that the perception had haunted her vaguely ever since she had returned from the town. Doubtless the change was in herself; she was very much changed, she knew it; and she gloried in it. A trifling sensation of this sort should not have weight with her. Perhaps she was tired. Acting on the assumption, her implements were thrown aside, and she herself withdrew to rest

In the course of the night she awoke very suddenly from a dream of exceptional vividness. She had, it seemed, been wandering over the moors in the teeth of a fierce east wind, unbroken grey curtaining the firmament from all horizons, and reducing the scene beneath to a stretch of drearest desolation. In her sleep Ebba was conscious of an unwonted sensation of uneasiness, or even fear, at the conditions which to her waking faculties were rather inspiring. The black fir-trees which she passed looked so very black, and, as though to harmonise with her own disordered feelings, assumed an attitude of gaunt affright as they saw her pass. She heard the wind wail in homeless lamentation through the swaying boughs as she accelerated her pace ; but, fancying

that with it was mingled the sound of human voices, she turned in timorous alarm, and saw in the grey gloom beneath the trees a figure, instantly suggesting her father, but in all the hideous disguise of a human skeleton. It summoned her, and all in dread as she was, she turned and followed it. What had been but a clump of trees had now become a limitless forest, offering an impenetrable vista of tall grey trunks, rising in appalling silence from the thick barren carpet of decaying needles, and overhung by that weird sough of the wind in the swaying canopy of crests above. The grim spectre strode on speechless before, never turning,—some mystical intuitive assurance satisfying him of his companion's noiseless attendance behind. Although she trembled, Ebba could not

but follow. As it seemed, in the heart of this wood they came to a tall flat rock, in a crevice of which Ebba distinctly saw a solemn, long-nebbed bird, standing with its neck between its shoulders and its eyes on her. Although the bony arm had seemed wholly inadequate, it was extended with ease, and something which Ebba knew to be a key, although bearing no resemblance to any known implement of the human artificer, was taken from the beak of the bird. With it the rock was opened, and the dreamer was admitted within. There a curious spectacle was presented, consciously curious to the sleeper in her dream. She knew herself to be in a gigantic library, of limitless extent, befitting national collections; but, when she came to regard the vast

array of presses in which the volumes were arranged, a strange uncertainty of vision came upon her, and nothing but ranks of solemn skeletons were presented to her gaze. In turning to inquire of her guide, Ebba awoke and found her forehead moist and aching from the mental stress occasioned by the vision. It was a long time before she could sleep again.

After breakfast the following morning, knowing her father to be shut up in the library, Ebba proceeded thither. She knocked and tried the door, but it resisted her.

‘You, Abb?’ cried the vicar, from within, and was answered by a request for permission to enter.

‘I am very much engaged, if it would do at another time.’

‘Certainly, father,’ and Ebba turned away.

But she did not go immediately to her own employment. She heard through the open doorway a linnet singing in the garden outside, and being reflectively inclined she turned in that direction. It was a dull overclouded morning, and as the girl regarded the scene about her, she mused upon the sinister effect of absence of the sun. Her dream came back to her, and all the weird sensation of it. In the ensuing rumination she chanced to take the path skirting the library window, but becoming suddenly aware of the ignoble suggestion which such action must inevitably inspire, she turned back abruptly, not however before her eye had fallen on the panes in question. It was with something of a

shock that she perceived the blind to be lowered, all sunless though the heavens. Instantaneously it recurred to her that since her return that blind had been persistently lowered ; a fact hitherto unheeded by reason of the glaring skies. With a wholly novel current of reflection Ebba retired to her room, and remained immured there.

In the afternoon Mr. Wanless went out, intent upon some pastoral duty. Scarcely had he passed the garden-gate before his agitated daughter was at the library-door. Again it was locked ; and, upon looking through the key-hole, it was seen that the key was gone. Passing her hand across her brow, Ebba found it as feverish as upon awakening from her dream. She went instantly to the kitchen, and, finding

the maid there, confronted her with a tragic stare.

‘Jeanie, what is this?’ she said, her voice quivering with emotion. ‘What was done in my absence? In the—library?’

‘I knew you must find it,’ exclaimed the girl, ‘for all the master bade me.’

‘Find what? What happened?’

‘I believe master sent away some of the books. He was days in there without food, and some men from Newcastle took away some terrible heavy boxes.’

Ebba only looked at her with a vacant stare and went away. In her own room she wept bitterly.

But Ebba’s concession to her emotions was of brief duration. She showed no altered aspect to her father, nor did she in

any way relax her efforts in artistic production. To all outward appearance things went on as they had done. The request for admittance to the library was not repeated, and if the remarkable acquiescence aroused any conscious speculation in the clergyman he betrayed none of it, nor did he volunteer any more explicit information as to the secret of the chamber.

It was on the following Sunday morning, two days after the disquieting discovery, that Ebba, before going as usual to church, exchanged some confidential words with her maid.

‘Jeanie,’ she said, boldly, ‘I am going to trust you with an important business. I might excite my father’s suspicion if I stayed from church, and I don’t want to

add to his vexations. This morning a man will come to examine the lock on the library-door. You will see him, and let him do what is necessary. I may as well tell you that he is going to make me another key for it. You understand? And you know that I do not wish it to be talked about through the whole parish.'

The girl's enthusiastic concurrence was easily gained, and Ebba went to church.

It chanced that the following day the weather broke up, and Mr. Wanless through the rainy days that followed was much confined to the house. Nearly all his time was spent in the library as a matter of course, but he was subjected to no interruption. His daughter sought no interview, required no book. But, secluded as she

also remained, her mind was not exclusively devoted to the task of her fingers. On the Tuesday she received through the post a small parcel, carefully packed, the exterior of which suggested anything but the actual contents,—a simple key. With its reception the whole of her perturbation was revived. She listened for her father's steps and closely watched his movements, but he did not leave the house. That closing of the library-door and the click of the handle had become a nightmare to her. She could support it no longer.

On the Wednesday evening, therefore, she threw aside her pencil and tried to read. Whatever she took up received but divided attention ; nevertheless, the hours passed. Supper over, she again withdrew.

Now she could not even pretend to hold the volume. In tremulous agitation she paced the floor, pausing with her ear at the door every few minutes to listen for sounds. The maid-servant had long since retired, but all remained silent below. She could only hear the measured tick of the old clock on the landing, and, her window being open, the patient toddle of the burn outside. At length she moved hurriedly away, and became absorbed in work. Once more there was that intolerable sound, and the measured step upon the stairs ensuing. The accustomed knock, and the vicar entered. He looked haggard and old, and, as was now always the case, the glare of Ebba's lamp seemed to oppress his eyeballs.

‘The water is very loud to-night, Abb,’

he remarked, in laying a hand upon her shoulder.

‘ Yes, from the rain.’

They kissed as usual; the clergyman bade her not stay long; and they had parted for the night.

A short time later Ebba opened her door noiselessly, and with a candle in her hand descended the stairs. Like a ghost she glided, without sound, for she had removed her slippers. Her resolute features looked pale in the candle-light, and the end of the key which she clutched was visible from between her fingers. On the rug at the library doorway she paused, and, throwing a glance up the stairs, listened. All was impressively still. She knelt, in order to fit the key carefully without any sound, and, in trying to turn

it, quivered with agitation. The smith had done his work well, for the lock slipped easily backwards, and Ebba knew that the door was open. The imperceptible movement of the hinges awakened not exactly an echo, but a chill sense of funereal gloom and void. Into it Ebba boldly stepped, and closed the door behind her.

The vicar's writing-table and chair stood as usual in the middle of the room, and upon the former the girl placed her candle. There were papers there, obviously in the course of writing, but she did not glance at those. Resting the fingers of one hand on the rim of the table, Ebba fixed her gray eyes immovably upon the untenanted rows of shelves which covered the walls. The sight could not now inspire her with

surprise, whatever other sensation may have assailed her. Not the slightest emotion was visible ; all sense culminating in that fixed stare alone. The water was loud,—louder here than in her own room ; the dull plunge of a small linn being audible on this side of the house. It entered vaguely into her indeterminate reverie, blending appropriately with its note.

For some moments the more practical aspects of the vision could not occur to her. The removal of one definite element of her existence ; the sudden annihilation of what had always been a primary constituent of the universe, was too disconcerting to admit of minor considerations. A whole world had fallen, and had Ebba stood alone in one of the ruined cities of an eastern desert, with ‘ the lone and level

sands 'around, her sense of stupendous collapse could not possibly have been keener. In a vividly imaginative nature, what had been by force of circumstance saved from the demands of domestic emotions had inevitably been expended upon this world of books, visible and incarnate in the form of her father's library, and the downfall of the embodiment became a matter of primordial loss. Only in unutterable calm could a blow of such magnitude be received.

So far as Ebba could perceive, when at length she viewed the scene as of any definite suggestion, not a volume remained in the room. A large Bible lay open on the table in front of where the clergyman sat and wrote, but anything else capable of sustaining the designation book was

not to be seen within the four walls. The comprehensiveness of the dissolution added no doubt to the depth of the original impression, but ultimately it was also an important element in the release of the victim from the spell. It first called Ebba to a conscious examination of the room, with the immediate result of a significant discovery. At the shaded extremity of one shelf lay the vicar's manuscript catalogue of his own collection, bound as a thin quarto. It required all Ebba's courage in the handling, but examine it she did.

The library had been a good one, although free from all obtrusion of merely purchase value. Any book you wanted you would have found there, and probably some that you would not have thought of requiring. No serried ranks of sumptuous

sets, certainly, costing their owner but a flourish of the pen to acquire; nothing of merely adventitious interest or value. Foibles in the matter of size and edition, of course, Mr. Wanless had had, (who ever founded a library without them?) but such only as were dictated by a liberal taste and intellect; whilst the one amiable weakness which had made him free of the inner biblio-cosmos had been his press devoted to what he himself termed ‘Robin Hood literature,’ an exhaustive collection of material for the ethnological study of outlaws.

The catalogue, therefore, which Ebba had discovered was of a detailed nature, constructed upon all the technical niceties of the bibliographer. The very edition of every work contained in it was elaborately

specified and at once recognizable to the initiated. Every item that she read, raised the ghostly vision of a volume, for with all she had been on more or less familiar terms. Ebba pondered them with knitted brows for some minutes longer, then with firm and decisive step she withdrew from the chamber, leaving the door ajar and carrying with her the volume she had found.

She had resolved to make a duplicate copy of it, and with the resolution seething in her mind she could not rest until a commencement had been made. Until the clock struck two, the young woman scribbled as hard as pen could carry her; then, with aching brow, she crept down again to the library, replaced the tragic memorial in its shaded nook, and, locking

the door stealthily behind her, went away to seek her couch.

It took the small hours of several nights before Ebba's task was concluded, but when it was done she found some measure of rest for her soul.

CHAPTER V.

A VISIT FROM GLEN.

‘YOUR letter came as a veritable breath from the hills to me,’—wrote Augusta in response to Ebba’s enthusiastic communication,—‘and perhaps for a moment I envied you such idyllie conditions of labour; but the fleeting sensation was speedily rectified. It, however, reminded me that beneath my artistic perceptions I am very, very human, and that there is little radically poetical about me. I cannot but

agree with Sam Johnson as to the virtues of Fleet Street. All else is for casual disporting, infinitely delightful from such standpoint, but—well, something very different for diurnal consumption. I need hardly say with what alacrity I shall avail myself of your kind invitation, “when occasion serves”; all the more keenly, you will believe me, in that I shall thereby again enjoy your invigorating conversation.

‘ I much deplore the ill news about your father. I trust that it is only

‘ You speak of the paltry *services* I rendered you, but what are they, indeed, in comparison of your relegation to me of this delightful creature Handsel? Now that *you* are not here to eclipse her, she shines out in amazing individuality. I am not only charmed with her piquant person-

ality, but as deeply interested in her remarkable intelligence. It will not surprise you, (but you will forgive it if it did me,) that under no possible conditions is she foolish. More in playful mischief, I must admit, than with any more serious intention, I yesterday employed her in the capacity of my pseudo-secretary, and as part of her duty dispatched her for some hours to the Museum to get me matter for a paper on an agricultural question *à propos* of the present disquiet. True, I did roughly indicate some principal sources, but in the result I was very literally floored! She practically brought me back the article itself ready for the press! In all sober earnest, save in the matter of length, I had not half-a-dozen lines to alter. You shall see it when it appears. This,

you will believe, has very definitely confirmed my appropriation of her, had such been needed. She utterly repudiates ambition ; but this angers me. Such substantial talent must be put to progressive uses. The mere fact surely of her being a woman necessitates it in these days. Feeding cattle is an admirable employment, but it can be done by others less essential to the race. If it should prove necessary, you must please exert the whole of your exceptional influence upon her, for I will not wrong you with a possible thought of disagreement with *my* contention. You shall, of course, know how we get on, and I hope without impertinence I may beg for any hint suggested by Handsel's own communications to yourself.

‘I do not fail to appreciate your brother’s intellectual conversation. He came in for a minute or two on the evening of your departure, but, since, neither Handsel nor I have heard anything of him.

‘The prima donna has definitely declined to take up her abode with her cousin, so the latter has got a very suitable room in a street behind my own. The former, I fear, is determined upon being beyond our range of influence. I hope no catastrophe may befall her, but needless to say that in such a course security is past praying for.’

Scarcely had Augusta put the last words to this epistle when Handsel came in to her, and was greeted with customary affability.

‘Just sending my report to the mountains,’ cried the former, brandishing an envelope. ‘Have you anything to add?’

‘I wrote this morning, thank you.’

Augusta looked with animation at her visitor.

‘How much for your tongue, Miss Gilholme? It is glorious.’

Laughing, Handsel sat down, and watched her companion scribble the address. When their eyes encountered,—the envelope to the writer’s tongue,—the onlooker asked,

‘Has my cousin been in to you?’

‘Glen? . . . No.’

‘I just met her flitting through the street, so I thought it possible.’

The other passed some ordinary comment and the subject was dismissed. But

Handsel thought once or twice about it.

The meeting was by appointment, Miss Lavington having enthusiastically volunteered her intellectual experiences for the guidance of the novice, and occasions of intercourse having in consequence been definitely provided. The former naturally possessed but conventional conceptions of the rustic character, and was doomed to experience frequent surprises. Handsel's intellect, if somewhat indeterminate, was by no means a crude one. She had, of course, never cultivated her mental faculties with a view to definite application, but a strongly intelligent curiosity in close neighbourhood with the Linnbrig Vicarage had carried her far. Even now, expressly stimulated as she found herself since the

moment of her independence, she invariably smiled at any suggestion of a professional education.

‘I have not come to seek a living here,’ she again warmly declared to her tormentor in the course of this very evening. ‘I have simply come to college to learn, and my professors are the sights and books that I couldn’t get in the hills. If they lead me to anything at last, I’ll be quite satisfied, but I’m not going to think of that on the way.’

‘Certainly,’ replied Augusta to this defence, ‘but even when people go to college they generally regulate their studies to some extent by the future they have in view.’

‘No doubt, and so do I; for my only

future is one of more information than I have now.'

'But, if by adopting a certain course you can do more good than you would otherwise, surely you will adopt it?'

'Good is not understood by everybody in the same way,' returned Handsel, doggedly. 'I did as much good in looking after the sheep at Windylaw as if I had been writing all the newspapers in London.'

'You will soon think differently, my dear Handsel.'

'Perhaps so.'

Augusta was now familiar with her new friend's attitude, but was never weary of returning to the attack. It of course in no way interrupted the geniality of their

intercourse; enhanced it possibly by adding the piquant constituent necessary to rescue the situation from one of merely tame subservience.

‘Well, you have such opportunities as few start with,’ concluded Augusta, carelessly, ‘if you only cared to avail yourself of them. Mr. Pettipher would in the very nature of things be intensely interested in seeing you develop into a contributor, if only out of territorial considerations. I have no doubt he would see that you had especial facilities for doing so, if you only took the trouble to acquaint him with your abilities and aspirations.’

‘I have no desire to acquaint him with them,’ was the imperturbable rejoinder. ‘And I certainly hope, Miss Lavington, that you will not do it for me.’

‘Of course not, until you wish it: which you will, you will. He is really a good fellow, as no doubt you know.’

‘It is very likely, but I did not know.’

‘You don’t?’ said Augusta, looking up with an odd expression as though something in her friend’s disclaimer had struck her.

‘How should I?’

‘I only thought that perhaps in shooting or hunting over the moors—in the country there are so many ways of meeting people like that. The footing of landlords and tenants is proverbial.’

‘I suppose so,’ said Handsel. ‘But I only know Mr. Cornelius by sight. He was never a sportsman like his father.’

‘Really? Well, that rather surprises

me. When I met him at Mr. Furbisher's I had a contrary impression.'

Augusta, not disguising her curiosity in a gentleman inevitably of much professional interest to herself, relaxed for the nonce her well-known intolerance of gossip, and induced Handsel to disclose such meagre personal details of the family of the potentate as the dependent could command.

'I suppose the old feudal interdependence is extinct, then,' observed the young lady, presumably in response to some supposed lack of enthusiasm in her companion. 'It seems a deplorable loss.'

'It is,' said Handsel.

They talked much of books for a full hour thereafter, but it was the former inconsiderable topic that Augusta was conscious

of pondering when she again sat alone. It was not long since she had met Mr. Pettipher at the house of their editor, and he had been gracious to her, with especial reference to her abilities ; that was all.

But even her peculiar claims upon the journalist's consideration could not induce Handsel to modify the extreme independence of her attitude. She had come on her travels out of a disinterested zeal for humanizing knowledge, and in that pursuit alone could her enthusiasm be aroused. The acquisition of such a colleague as Miss Lavington was on many accounts of very great value, but the student was resolute in appropriating her to such purposes only as her own instinct invariably pointed out, or at least approved. With all her unconventional

enterprise, the homely girl was deplorably old-fashioned, and this it was which irritated her friend.

They met frequently, and upon each occasion Handsel's development became increasingly obvious. The accession of intellectual confidence wrought a corresponding physical growth, which enhanced considerably the young woman's particular charms, at no time to be ignored. She had, too, in slight ways modified her attire, which brought it in closer harmony with her sophisticated surroundings, and did not by any means detract from her personal recommendations. Augusta's interest in her as steadily progressed, and expanded the genial intimacy which their intercourse had now assumed. Such leisure as the lady journalist could command

from her multifarious social and professional engagements was magnanimously bestowed upon Handsel, and the two were frequently to be seen together in resorts of artistic or historic importance, engaged in an animated investigation and debate. Nor were definite amusements neglected; such theatres and concerts as at that season were available being frequently patronized by them.

One evening in the light of sunset, Handsel, proceeding as usual to her friend's abode, literally collided with a young woman at the street corner, and both at the moment regarding each other recognized relationship.

‘Again,’ thought Handsel, examining Glen’s features, but not immediately speaking.

‘You!’ exclaimed the other, with less reticence.

‘Been to Miss Lavington?’ asked Handsel.

‘I? No; what should *I* go for? I am not respectable enough,’—but, altering her tone to one more conciliatory, added—‘Is Mr. Shiel there?’

‘I should think not. I have never seen him there.’

‘Whooo——’ whistled Glen, in polite deprecation. ‘I know that he goes there.’

‘I doubt it; but what if he does?’

‘Nothing, of course,’ said Glen, more pertly. ‘He can go where he likes; but does he know that Mr. Pettipher goes there too?’

There was an unpleasant glare from

the pretty serpent-like eyes to accompany the query.

Handsel laughed.

‘He is hardly likely to trouble himself about such a matter . . . But one moment, Glen. I have had to tell you that you are a little fool before, so need not repeat it. As you seem so greatly interested in Mr. Shiel, however, I may just ask you if you think to make him favourable by watching all his movements, and throwing yourself at him like—like—well, like those that we winna name? Do you?’

‘I have not watched his movements,’ hissed Glen.

‘Only because there are none to watch, I suppose,’ was Handsel’s calm comment.

‘ You know that you have tried to. But I may tell you from my own knowledge that it is more than three weeks since Miss Lavington heard a word about him, and I myself have heard no more.’

‘ I’ll not believe any one of you,’ cried Glen, and had scarcely turned when the ready tears burst forth. Handsel went on and turned into No. 29.

The encounter with her misguided cousin, for whom she owned a particular tenderness, had somewhat subdued Handsel, so that she was perhaps all the more prepared to detect an exceptional impulsiveness in her learned friend. There was even a hint of nervous perturbation fringing the well-cut lips and nostrils of Augusta, and a startling acquiescence in interlocutory common-places. Handsel

adapted herself to circumstances with well-bred composure, but none the less marvelled. After much talk of an uncle from York who had just come to town, and who would command for a few days all her available leisure, Miss Lavington changed the topic with some measure of abruptness.

‘Mr. Pettipher wants me to undertake some work in St. Petersburg,’ was her announcement, ‘and I hardly know what to say about it. What would *you* say, now, Handsel?’

Augusta broke off into a jaunty vein not at all natural to her, as she took her stand on the hearth-rug and linked her hands behind her.

‘For you I should think it would be favourable,’ said the other, sagely.

‘How terribly serious ! You deprecate the cosmopolitan craze, I suppose ? But it would be grand, Handsel. Russia is the coming country, the most interesting field in Europe. To say nothing of professional advancement. Oh, I cannot surely refuse it ?’

‘Why should you ?’ asked Handsel, innocently, raising her eyes to her friend’s face.

‘You may well ask . . . Because, I suppose, I am not so thoroughly unskirted as I pretend,’ laughed Augusta. ‘My abominable provincial nature hangs about me. I have never been further than Paris.’

‘All continental cities are much the same, I should think.’

‘No doubt,’ mused the other, absently,

gazing at Handsel. ‘Much the same . . . Women ought to act freely. It is all I am fighting for.’

‘Certainly. I cannot see that mere locality makes much difference.’

Throughout the subsequent conversation, which was unusually light and exceptionally disjointed, Augusta would occasionally betray by look or question the constant undercurrent of reflection attending her. Nor did she make the slightest effort to disguise that its constant form was that of debate, more or less disquieting. Indecision in her companion struck Handsel as a singular incongruity, and a novel one. In her private ruminations, it was precisely the contrary characteristic which had claimed exclusive consideration; not, Handsel admitted, with unre-

served approval on her own part. Much as she admired Augusta, and very far as she exalted her above the commonplace acquiescence of the world that she had known, Handsel was by no means satisfied with a servile acceptance of her friend's ideal. She felt it possible to evolve yet another of her own, in which her peculiar ethical and intellectual requirements received more satisfactory blending. But Handsel could seldom be got to dogmatize. She observed and appropriated, without ever disclosing an assumption of her own.

Whilst they were still talking, a maid appeared announcing a visitor.

‘Don’t move. It will only be my uncle.’

But, to the astonishment of both, it was Mr. Shiel Wanless who entered, and Au-

gusta at once assumed her buoyant attitude.

The man looked unusually pale and thin, but greeted the two with marked cordiality. There was a freedom from constraint, an obvious spiritual frankness about him which struck his observers as unusual. He had a flat paper parcel in his hand, which in preliminary talk he placed on the table, without making any reference to it. Augusta continued.

Glen, after constant espionage during recent weeks, had failed to detect Shiel upon this compromising errand. Doubtless, disappointment in the confirmation of an ineradicable suspicion had irritated her beyond the reach of consolation from the mere want of success. Although she had been unable to find him here, or even in his own street, she did not conclude

either that he never went forth, or that he never visited Miss Lavington. Her ill-success had simply become an aggravation of the fates, and had exasperated her accordingly. From her interview with Handsel, upon this particular evening, she had gone direct to Shiel's abode. Indirect surveillance could no longer suffice her. Whatsoever the result, the whole triumph should by no means be wholly theirs.

Shiel, who had scarce an hour ago put the closing words to the supreme literary effort which for more than three feverish weeks had wholly engrossed him, sat with tea and toast upon Glen's arrival. He displayed open displeasure when she appeared before him, but he permitted her the interview, taking his stand upon the hearth-rug the while.

‘You must know that I object to this,’ he said, sternly. ‘What brings you here?’

‘I have only come to ask for Handsel’s address.’

He eyed her with ill-concealed suspicion.

‘And why to me?’

‘There was nobody else.’

‘Why didn’t you write? Or there was Miss Lavington.’

‘I won’t go to her,’ asserted Glen, with unexpected vehemence. ‘But if you are angry, I’ll——’

‘Not yet. What is your objection to Miss Lavington?’

‘I have no objection to her, but I won’t see her friends.’

‘Indeed? Are they so offensive?’

‘One, at any rate, is, and you thought so once, Mr. Shiel,’ retorted Glen, colouring as she faced him.

He returned the look calmly.

‘Go on, please.’

‘You think me anything now,’ she proceeded, excitedly, ‘just because I’m not quite so clever as others who have been born richer, but you didn’t always.’

‘It is no good coming here to talk nonsense,’ said Shiel, impatiently. ‘What has this to do with Miss Lavington’s friends?’

‘Perhaps you don’t know who her friends are. Do you think it is pleasant for me to go to a house where I meet Mr. Pettipher?’

Shiel viewed her silently for an instant, his mere reflection betraying nothing of

his inward attitude. Ultimately he laughed.

‘Do you think because Miss Lavington is connected with his paper that you will meet him at her house? You very much mistake the gentleman if you think he is acquainted with everybody who scribbles for him.’

‘But I am not mistaken about this, for I have seen him come from her door.’

Shiel showed keener interest, but passed off his movement with ‘Possibly,’ mildly uttered.

‘That does not make them friends,’ he presently added. ‘But I believe I have got the address. I asked her to send it me.’ He took a paper from a letter-rack on the wall. ‘There it is. That is how Handsel communicates with me, and I

shall be glad if you will adopt the same method in future.'

He gave her Handsel's note.

'Then may I never see you?'

'Certainly not,' but seeing her face, he added, 'Not here, at any rate,—understand that. I do not see what good can arise from your seeing me. You have chosen an occupation in which I cannot be of the slightest assistance to you, and you must be aware that intercourse of this kind is not common amongst civilized people.'

Glen took her departure in a very subdued manner, perplexed by the apparent failure of her bold design. That item of information had seemed a very bomb in her hands, but when she had thrown it, it had refused to burst. At another time

such result might have irritated her, but now it seemed only to depress. She fled from the street in tears, not aware that only a minute or two later Mr. Wanless also issued forth. Although her visit had angered him, he continued to see that appealing look of hers as he strode through the streets.

CHAPTER VI.

DAWN.

‘DAY and night for twenty-seven days have I been at it,’ Shiel was saying, with unwonted vivacity, his re-emergence into the light of Augusta’s presence acting powerfully upon a system already exhilarated by accomplished effort, ‘and in a wholly new direction. I have tried my hand at fiction, and I am going to ask if you will give me your opinion first upon it. Is it possible?’

His eyes rested for a moment's inquiry upon the young lady's face, but perceiving too much fascination in the play of her features, he lowered his glance immediately.

‘I shall be delighted enough,’ exclaimed Augusta, ‘but what is my opinion worth? I can only——’

‘It is just your opinion that will be worth very much. You have a wide, vigorous outlook, and it is from that practical standpoint that I want the thing judged. I want you to tell me if there is a single dramatic spark in it, or whether it is still but the outcome of a morbid egoism. Nobody can tell me this better than you, Miss Lavington.’

‘I thank you for your good opinion,’ laughed she. ‘At any rate, I promise to

‘speak honestly according to my light.’

‘That is all I wish. Then I need interrupt you no longer,’ said Shiel, rising.

‘Can you suggest any reasonable diversion? I am going to indulge in a fortnight’s dissipation. Is there anything at the theatres?’

‘A few last nights at the Lyceum; and the Savoy. But you will have been there.’

‘No,’—Shiel smiled his self-deprecation.
‘Anything else?’

Augusta gave him such rational amusements as she could think of, and he wrote them down.

‘That will be something to go on with,’ said he, jocularly, and took his leave.

Shiel felt his liberation in a way wholly new to him. With that manuscript which he had forged so valiantly he seemed to

have put off yet another portion of his burden, and he viewed the horizon with a sense of strange exhilaration. The world presented fresh and unsuspected possibilities, as to one who has suffered veritable incarceration, and the man felt eager to be proving it. The sordid labours of the crowd around him could even assume a more or less attractive guise; could re-inspire him with that lost aggressive zest in the handling of circumstance, but in a form vastly modified. He was exclusively iconoclast no longer; a vague perception of constructive masonry dawned upon him.

All the next day he flitted hilariously about the town, and towards evening, hot and stifling as was the summer air, he took his stand by the pit door of the Savoy Theatre. He got within the portico

at the bottom of the steps, a few others being there before him, and awaited the opening in a reflective scrutiny of the faces assembling about him. They interested him as never before ; a sympathetic tolerance entering into his criticism of the various expressions, such as some imaginative obscuration had previously rendered wholly impossible. After being engaged thus for some quarter-of-an-hour, he became dimly conscious of a familiar glance greeting him by glimpses from amidst the strange array of eyes between him and the steps. Vague it was at first, and scarce attended to ; but it rapidly became a point of definite attraction. It took him some seconds, however, to extricate the face of Handsel from the crowd, but when he had done so, he vigorously made his way to-

wards her. His tendency being backwards, he at length accomplished his purpose without material opposition. Reaching her, his satisfaction in the encounter was not disguised.

‘Alone?’ he whispered. ‘Do you often come like this?’

‘Once a week,’ said she.

‘So shall I in future. Does Miss Lavington ever come with you?’

‘She has taken me two or three times.’

‘But she doesn’t stand for an hour or two?’

‘She gets what she calls orders.’

‘Yes, yes, of course.’

‘She is going in the stalls to-night,’ remarked Handsel, in a matter-of-fact tone, but her eyes upon Shiel’s face all the time.

‘Not here?’

‘I thought you knew, perhaps.’

He looked at his companion direct, and for the first time in her life she saw him change colour.

‘I didn’t know,’ he said, smiling frankly, ‘but I am delighted to hear it. Is that why you have come?’

‘Not wholly. I can see her at any time.’

Handsel remained imperturbably dry, despite Shiel’s scrutiny.

They exchanged words now and then so long as they stood there, and when at length they were together in their places they talked more freely. There was an intense curiosity apparent in Shiel, which, seeing their respective experiences, contrasted oddly with the composure and

reticence of his companion. She seemed free from all manner of restraint, but still looked upon the spectacle presented to her with a critical self-possession, which it is just possible Shiel from time to time saw with envy.

‘She won’t be coming alone,’ hinted Shiel, who constantly interspersed his more general conversation with stray allusions of this kind.

‘With her uncle,’ was the response, rendered with more than usual abruptness.

‘She has relatives living in London, then?’

‘No, he is only visiting. He is a solicitor in York. Miss Lavington herself came from there.’

‘H’m,’ mused Shiel; but the entrance of the subject of their discussion suddenly

aroused him. 'There, Handsel,' he said, in an impulsive undertone, being at the moment conscious of an electric thrill through the whole of his system. Handsel only nodded.

Augusta looked remarkably beautiful in her evening attire as she was escorted to a seat by a handsome, middle-aged gentleman, also scrupulously clad. The free coiling of her ample dark hair over her firmly poised head gave the fair journalist a striking appearance of classical simplicity and distinction, the effect of which was heightened at the present moment by the display of a faultless marble neck and shoulders. Shiel's eyes were immovably fixed upon her, not the slightest grace of her trim, flexible figure apparently escaping him. An ejaculatory comment to his

companion from time to time was, however, all his speech. Handsel marvelled : so obvious, so ludicrously ingenuous and unconditional was the man's capitulation. From this first glimpse of her, Shiel himself was in ignorance no longer. Subjective and metaphysical theories did not assail him. The whole of his being drew an unutterable joy and stimulus from the mere regard of this exquisite creation, and nothing beyond could for the moment reach him. Old problems and antagonisms faded before this dazzling cosmos which had dawned upon his soul. He could only gaze upon Augusta and live. He was sufficiently aware that never had he lived before—work, relaxation, self-consuming argument,—all, all was blind fatuity. Here alone lay the secret to the

world,—to the whole sentient universe of God and man. If this were love, love was the only philosophy, and lovers the only reasonable beings.

Much of Shiel's impulsive egoism entered into this novel experience. An infinite tenderness for the visible object was no doubt within him, but he knew nothing of the delusion of altruistic passion. He asked not if he were indispensable to the soul of the adored ; if he only in the universe could achieve her destiny. The achievement was to himself, and all his soul required the completion. How was he to conceive of an individuality apart ? The ardour of his passion drew the object to itself, and merged it there in the comprehensive radiance.

In this condition of transcendent glow

it was not surprising that the practical setting rapidly became paltry and ignoble. If for an instant Shiel's consciousness were drawn to the material diversion displayed before him, he hurled it from him with characteristic vehemence. He found his antipathy to the world of fact again aroused, but built this time upon a foundation of surpassing strength. Flamboyant, quixotic, it had been before ; piercing the air with flashes of mere tinsel : now it arose impregnable, sublime.

In turning to speak to her companion, the light of Augusta's eye would reach this ardent gazer, and forthwith upon the radiant shaft a whole world of vision would appear, beckoning him on to untold victories. Away from this ; far, far away from all the sordid strife and

pleasure of a material stage were his pictures laid. In quiet dells amongst the mountains, perchance, where the honey-laden heath burdened the breezes ; in sunlit fields where the eye of avarice could never enter. A strange yearning for philosophies of peace possessed him. Mystic aspirations, clothed in familiar disguises which had long ceased to satisfy, were subtly reasserted, exhibited in various forms of alluring urgency. There, there he could live, could work, could do anything, sustained by this marvellously acquired force which so irresistibly impelled him. The music alone of all the surrounding realities consciously reached him. That, in its airy subtleties, insinuated itself into his fervid reverie, and furthered its soaring.

Long Shiel sped through these ethereal altitudes, with resumed characteristic assurance, knowing no check. With the rapid development of ideals, reticence increased in him, and any response to Handsel took but the form of indirect poetical vehemence. It was a new presentment of him to her, but one which she found unexpectedly attractive. When, unobserved, she studied his features, wholly new combinations were revealed which impressed her strangely. It might have been that some clue was betrayed there to hitherto unsuspected aspirations in herself; glimpses of an ideal world into which she had not yet so much as entered even in visionary moments. In the middle of the evening, whilst following this thread of reflection through the glittering mazes of

the music and the song, she felt her arm suddenly gripped by her companion, and, turning complacently to regard him, saw his visage changed and clouded. He said nothing in reply to her, but flung his eyes in grim attention to the stage. She watched his lip curl, and then looked away from him.

With the same placid indifference she sought the centre whence she knew such impulse could alone have had its source, and proceeded to draw her own conclusions. In a stall seat hitherto unoccupied, immediately by Miss Lavington's left shoulder, reclined a gentleman curling his moustache. He was of course in evening dress, and, when any emergency occasioned a movement of the head, he displayed a countenance of marked regularity and

composure, toned by an eye of critical coolness and acumen. Every glance and movement exhibited the acme of breeding; each smile being reduced to the strictest limits of good taste. A more or less confidential comment, presumably critical, with eyes towards the stage and brows inappreciably lifted, was from time to time received with show of mutual intelligence by his neighbour. The play of a signet finger, the measured sway of the head, would emphasize any remark of exceptional significance; but a wholly dispassionate outlook was the prevailing suggestion. It nevertheless seemed that Handsel's curiosity was aroused. It was now her eyes more markedly than those of her companion which followed the windings of that secondary drama. Shiel's

gaze was fixed on the legitimate stage, with but swift brevity of glance at the diversion.

At the close of the second act the two gentlemen on either side of Augusta underwent a formal introduction, and a more coherent conversation was indulged in. The obvious enthusiasm of the elder stood out in contrast to the more mature bearing of Mr. Pettipher, but it was received by the latter with marked condescension and good humour. It was some half hour later that Augusta and her uncle were again alone, and the seat on the former's left was vacant.

Shiel, equally with Handsel, no doubt had noted this; but no alteration was visible in his demeanour. Doggedly he kept his eyes to the players, staring in

silence. Presently, without warning, he turned away.

‘Will you come out?’ he said, in an undertone. ‘One can’t breathe here.’

After a few words Handsel acquiesced, and they made their way from the throng.

In the cooler night, Shiel dashed his handkerchief across his temples, and strode forward in silence. Into the turmoil of the Strand they passed, turning westwards, but no word was exchanged until they reached the freedom of Trafalgar Square.

‘How can one live here?’ was Shiel’s first remark. ‘How can one be satisfied with this grovelling imprisonment?’

He looked for an answer, but Handsel gave him none.

‘Here we have made a world unto our-

selves,' he proceeded, fervently ; ' a howling, sunless, deadening chaos. Here we grope on with faculties benumbed, making our diseases a philosophy, and the perceptions which have left us the mockers of our skill. Oh, Handsel, it is foul ! The real world is not what we have thought it. The world of the sun is not the dim and barren wilderness that all *this* would have us believe. No, the unreality lies here ; the true in what we have lost and vituperate.'

' Possibly,' said Handsel, seeing some comment to be inevitable, and not willing to engage in polemics.

' Wasn't it you that said the complication was of our own making ? I never knew until this minute how true that was. All is of our own making,—all the gross,

the insupportable. I have known nothing until this minute—nothing whatsoever.’

Handsel, who with the coolness of a disinterested observer was naturally thinking most of the matter-of-fact predicament suggested by the closing incident in the stalls, was not immediately in the vein for following this transcendent mood. With it, however, her companion regaled her until they parted at her door. Then Shiel strode buoyantly homewards.

He was in a ferment of exuberant idealism. The momentary irritation of which he had been conscious at sight of a man like Pettipher’s familiar proximity to that inspiring constellation, excited now only his vociferous derision. Social formalities she had, as yet, inevitably to go through,—but it should be changed. Such sterile

drolleries could by no possibility have abiding tolerance from her. Coupled with that initial resentment, Shiel had been aware of a more or less envious scrutiny of the well-bred interloper—his sleek address and fascinations—but this had gone with the other. That also was but part of the absurdity. She had an intellect beyond all that, at any rate: had not every word of hers infallibly pronounced it? All the man's perceptions were hurled back to the natural solitudes upon which his instinctive being was based, but with what difference of attitude? It was no longer the mere fascinations of a savage endurance alluring him: it was not the grim waste of sunless infinitude which invited. Flowery meadows and new-mown hay offered their attractions: roses

and golden sunsets. All the lighter poetical play of the spirit inspired him, and awakened various emotional aspirations.

Upon reaching his dwelling, in the full flush of this exhilarating impulse, he scribbled a note to his friend Smart.

‘DEAR CUDDIE,

‘You have a rectory somewhere in Arcadia. Will you come with me to display its attractions? I require a mouthful of fresh air.

‘Yours,

‘S. W.’

He went out forthwith to post it, and then spent most of the night in reading poetry and pondering moral essays.

Mr. Smart, being in town, did not keep his correspondent long in expectancy. ‘I

will meet you at Waterloo for the four o'clock this afternoon,' Shiel read at about noon the following day, and he did not fail to keep the appointment.

In the glory of the summer afternoon the two friends went down. All the country lay in hazy sunshine around them as they sped onwards; shaded lanes and homesteads, reclining cattle and picturesque groups of workers amongst the hay, eliciting enthusiastic comment from Shiel continually. When they chanced to be alone, he would expand into characteristic harangues upon urban and pastoral philosophies, which Smart received with his accustomed dry complacency, acquiescing where he saw it desirable, and giving a negative when it was vehemently demanded.

Shiel became rapidly convinced that all his conscious life hitherto had been none other than a huge protracted nightmare, from which nothing but the quickening touch of Augusta could by any possibility have aroused him. He did not in terms explain this to Smart, nor indeed did he so phrase his enlightenment as to convince that shrewd observer of the immediate agency in his conversion; but being himself a man of sensibility, under his extremely smooth exterior, Cuthbert could not but strongly suspect at least the nature of the mollifying influence.

The sunlight was mellowing for evening when the two alighted upon the platform of their destination. It was a small wayside station, pitched as it seemed in the midst of fields and wooded hedgerows,

without the slightest obvious relation to the requirements of a visible community. There was not even a church tower to be seen through the clouded elm-trees, nor a thatched roof of any kind, far or near. In the lane, some hundred yards from the railway gate, was a sign-post, but it appeared a ludicrous assumption of native *naïveté* to suppose that there could be anybody to whom the names of the places indicated could be of the smallest service. The station officials betrayed a respectful familiarity towards Mr. Smart as he alighted, and a porter took his bag from him.

‘Is Solomon here?’ said Cuthbert, and received an affirmative.

A light dog-cart stood outside, with a liveried footman at the horse’s head.

Smart exchanged a civil word with him, and then patted the neck of the animal, greeting him too by name. The travellers took their seats, Cuthbert driving, and, when the man was up, off they went.

Shiel smiled at his friend's way of doing things, himself not familiar with the refinements of affluence.

‘I expected a walk, Cuddie,’ he hinted, good-humouredly.

‘You shall have plenty, my dear boy. But it's good for the horses, you know. They have nothing to do just now.’

‘Have you let the place?’

‘No. We haven't decided what to do. It is in the hands of domestics.’

‘There is an inn, I suppose?’

‘Certainly, if you prefer it. But I shall have to raise the rent if you go there.’

It was with some surprise that Shiel discovered they had six miles yet to drive. The rural placidity and sense of remoteness had already seemed exhilarating enough, but the promised additional seclusion held out unspeakable allurements. Marvellous ferny lanes and enravishing cottages in thatch were constantly presented, with perhaps the picturesque figure of a rustic trudging homewards from his labours in the sunlight. Shiel was in a mood to be inordinately impressed by it all. His northern moorlands he had always thought to be a portion of himself; but they seemed to have gone with that past forgotten existence. As he thought of them in this umbrageous luxuriance, they loomed unutterably cold and cheerless. Lone, lone,

as he had never before conceived them.

Smart's inheritance fully sustained the usurping ideal. The mansion was in point of size but a minor country residence, but, for all that, one rich in idyllic appointments. Situated on a wooded slope of accredited English predilection, in the midst of unlimited verdure, its overgrown gables presented to Shiel the acme of poetical suggestion. As they entered, the sun just dipping to the hills, the shaded hall, with its oaken wainscot and furniture, confirmed the impression, and Shiel could not but suspect his friend to be one of the fortunate of the earth.

As they sat alone at the dinner-table, something to such effect was even openly hinted, Cuthbert himself proving ready enough to acquiesce.

‘Yes, it is a delightful little place,’ said he, ‘and connected with some of my pleasantest memories. I should never care to let it. If I ever get married, I expect I shall spend a good deal of my time here ; granted a congenial consort.’

‘A place like this can generally command it,’ remarked Shiel, sipping his wine.

‘Unfortunately, by no means with certainty. We are an unphilosophical generation, Shiel. But why not you come down here? We might make something of the place together, man.’

‘We might.’

‘You are not enamoured of the pavement?’

‘I? It is the curse of our time : the

blight and termination of all reasonable faculties . . . Is there inherent ignobility in the toga ?’

The question was put with such inconsequent abruptness that Smart had to reflect an instant to resolve it.

‘Merely an historical adornment, it seems to me,’ he said at length. ‘The uniform of an indispensable office.’

‘Yes, indispensable in many senses,’ affirmed Shiel, with some emphasis, thankful for the word. ‘But the necessity of it demands some vindication, doesn’t it? Especially in the country.’

‘I believe so.’

‘Had it been otherwise, be assured the ignobility would never have been suspected. If the officials had ever legiti-

mately exercised their influence,—oh, Cuddie, this land and the world might have been different.’

‘Undoubtedly.’

‘Can’t one discern the ideal man—the man at touch with all the highest imagination of his time, interpreting and dispensing it in humanizing influence to the particular units of his parish? The work is a glorious one. Could there be desired a more comprehensive educational power? Or one which it would be more invigorating to take part in? What is the population of your parish?’

‘One hundred and forty.’

‘Of whom half, presumably, are children,—it would be compassable. We will march the boundaries to-morrow. Is there a reasonable dwelling?’

‘You shall see. In my judgment, not greatly inferior to this.’

‘Really?’ Shiel looked at him and laughed aloud,—then quaffed more wine. Surely he had found the clue to the world at last?

The next morning Shiel woke early, and surveyed the country from his window. A singular buoyancy still sustained him; an imaginative halo still illumined the expanse of verdure which the sun was just then gilding. At their very first interview had *she* not prophesied, in the face of his most aggressive repudiation, that he would yet find it? Had she even then suspected the power through which it was to be revealed? . . .

Several days did Cuthbert and Shiel spend here in undisguised enjoyment of

the poetical repast which the secluded district so lavishly afforded. Finding his imagination so inordinately stirred, and in so wholly unprecedented a direction, it was inevitable that he should find a certain exhilaration in giving it the most unbounded play. The higher he rose, the further he found himself from that old restricted self, the merest suggestion of which could now arouse an angry flutter in his breast. A logical repudiation of it, he had never been foolish enough to indulge in. Sensation was law to Shiel, and he only knew that his present perceptions were the very negation of his past: he inquired no further. So far at least was he endowed with the artistic temperament.

In the examination of the rectory house

a much greater reticence was preserved. A zealous exclamation would sometimes escape him, as at some particular peep from a window or other exterior glimpse, but for the most part the sensations which the place evoked, the subtle imaginings of the fervid intellect, were consumed in silence. Under certain conditions very much seemed possible here. Under those conditions very much should be possible, Shiel secretly averred.

‘Then practically you accept?’ enquired Smart in the course of the last evening which they were to spend there.

All converse had been indeterminate before; directed towards the enunciation of the widest and most transcendental principles.

‘I will look into the preliminaries,’ said

Shiel, with what seemed some measure of reluctance, ‘and let you know at once.’

The next day they returned to London.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TWO WAYS.

IN the well-upholstered room sacred to the *Herald's* editor, there was a small conclave proceeding with reference to a minor matter of procedure personally promoted by Mr. Cornelius Pettipher. That gentleman, having of late definitely transferred himself from the academic quadrangle to a more immediate attendance upon the heraldic seat of government, was, despite his novitiate, apparently intent upon

impressing on his colleague, Mr. Furbisher, and such subalterns as it might directly concern, a personality of which, in the execution of their journalistic duties, they would have very definitely to take account. Pettipher was, from the standpoint of practical literature, a man of very considerable parts, having, as we know, undergone a special course of training directly under his father's experienced eye; and, had that potentate of polite commerce lived to see the consummation of his professional theories, there could have been small doubt of his unreserved satisfaction at the result which had been attained.

Mr. Pettipher himself stood with one elbow on the chimney-piece, facing his editor, who sat in a revolving chair at the

table, and Miss Augusta Lavington, who, in well-restrained commotion, occupied another morocco chair by the waste-paper basket. It was Pettipher who was speaking.

‘As I have told you before, Mr. Furbisher, I am going to make a specialty of Russia. It is a country of the most absorbing interest and importance, by no means second to Germany, which you are so inordinately strong about. Now, in addition to our merely political and general matters, I want to make a special feature of social studies. Not socialistic merely, you understand : social, in the broad sense of the term. I want a series of papers on the position and development of Russian women, for instance,—they *are* Russia, of course. It must be comprehensive, ex-

haustive, and written from the inside. Nobody but a woman can do it, and, from work I have seen of yours, I believe you, Miss Lavington, to be the one.'

'Certainly, a good idea. It might ultimately be enlarged. Beginning with St. Petersburg, we might treat all the capitals in turn.'

'Undoubtedly. Thoroughly handled, I believe we could make something of it. You concur?'

Pettipher looked at the young lady with his question.

'By all means,' said Augusta. 'The topic is a vital one. But, if I undertook it, it would be largely as woman that I should treat the theme, and not merely as Russia.'

'To be sure. That is precisely why I

thought of you. It is as an element in contemporary progress that the subject ought to be viewed. On any narrower basis it would be of little value. It is in that sense I accept the whole country.'

'Much subsidiary matter of value could be obtained under such opportunities,' interposed the editor. 'You would have an eye to light articles, Miss Lavington, on anything suggesting itself.'

Augusta readily acquiesced, but there was still something about her which hardly suggested enthusiastic spontaneity in the enterprise. Being naturally of exceptional decisiveness, the hesitation was perhaps the more apparent. She preferred, it would seem, to keep the discussion as long as possible upon merely general terms, although the proposition had al-

ready been for some time before her, and no doubt would have continued to do so ; but that journalism can afford such scant consideration for the vacillating moment. She took care to enter exhaustively into the estimate of the proposal, presenting it in every possible light that it could assume in her imaginative eyes, with a view one might have thought of revealing how precisely she had grasped her principal's meaning at all points and in all its suggestive bearings, as well merely as of working up her own intellectual enthusiasm to the point of the undertaking itself. Her presentment of the theme on a wide philosophical basis very nearly convinced Mr. Furbisher of there possibly being something in it, but having his own preconceptions of the office of daily journal-

ism that gentleman waited to see it in remunerative practice. He saw no reason, however, for thwarting what was so obviously a pet project of his enterprising junior. Mr. Pettipher upon favourable occasion seemed even to cast a peculiarly interested glance at the head of his insignificant contributor, but it would have been absurd indeed to suppose that Augusta's decision could have been of the slightest import to the drivers of so comprehensive a machine as the *Daily Herald*.

‘The language, I fear, would be a considerable obstacle——’

‘Oh, French of course is all sufficing; at any rate, in the first instance. In a few months you would have a working acquaintance with the language. Will you undertake the thing?’

‘Undoubtedly I should wish to,’ returned Augusta. ‘May I give my final decision to-morrow?’

‘We should be unreasonable otherwise,’ said Pettipher, lightly; and after a closing word or two they turned to some other consideration.

Miss Lavington felt an engrossing interest in the subject which had been propounded to her, and it can only be attributed to some of the subtle psychological disturbances to which poor moderns are subjected that she did not abandon herself to an exuberant adoption of the scheme. It was certain that she did not, as her now familiar Handsel had from the very outset detected. It might even have appeared ludicrous how insular and sentimental this enlightened young lady was of a sudden

in danger of becoming. No district visitor could have expounded more convincingly the claims of one's own land and kindred.

None the less, the following day Augusta acquainted her employers with her resolution to accept their proposal, and to be in readiness for their further instructions. She wrote also to her friend Ebba in the remote vicarage of Linnbrig, informing her of the impending change in the scene and nature of her labours, and enlarging characteristically upon the glorious expansion of the outlook.

‘I rather oddly hesitated in the first place,’ wrote she, vivaciously; ‘but, now that I have accepted, the horizon grows radiant before me. It is not pleasant to have to experience that so much of the Philistine still lingers about one.’

The natural response to this communication was a vigorous entreaty to spend one or two of the days preceding her departure in the recuperative silence of the mountains; a suggestion which chanced to recommend itself very forcibly to Augusta. Even she had confessed to an exhilarating influence in the solitary enthusiast, and she felt an inclination of peculiar persuasiveness to the discussion with her of this new and important project. After a detailed examination, therefore, of her engagements, she wrote appointing a day.

Part of Augusta's business at this disturbed time was the perusal of the manuscript which Mr. Wanless had somewhat inconsiderately foisted upon her. That gentleman had in personal intercourse

presented such remarkable inconsistencies of deportment, and of a kind for which the lady journalist was so wholly unprepared and for which she could sustain so scant a measure of tolerance, that the enthusiasm inspired in the first instance by a magazine paper or two of his was in danger of going out altogether. A deplorable part about it, too, was that this manuscript story was by no means calculated to resuscitate the spark. She found it inexpressibly tedious, despite the obvious merits of the writing, and in the face of the author's confident demand for frank honesty of opinion the prospect was not re-assuring. Honest, however, she intended to be, and the simplest way out of the difficulty seemed to be a written expression of her convictions. This

ultimately she wrote and despatched.

It chanced that it was posted to Shiel on the very day of his return with Mr. Smart from the country. He was sitting in his lodgings in the evening, reading Wordsworth under a wholly novel dispensation, when the letter was brought in to him. The writing was not familiar, and he opened the missive carelessly ; but upon reading the first line and then turning abruptly to the conclusion, he felt a violent commotion of the blood throughout his system. He perused the letter in a state of considerable agitation.

The mere sentiments expressed evoked but an insignificant fraction of his disorder. Although he had now in his pocket the last twenty pounds which he could by any ordinary method command in the

world, to do Shiel full justice, his literary labours did not even yet present themselves to him as a possible means of livelihood, nor their merits with any slightest reference to commercial needs. That of late months they had chanced to conform to such, and hence provide him with sustenance, was in spite of, rather than as a result of, his conscious endeavour. Therefore he was by no means seeing the foreshadow of a publisher's opinion in the words Augusta had sent him, as the more dramatic instinct would inevitably have done. His whole construction was obviously subjective ; with sole reference, that is, to himself and the new cosmos revealed in him.

With the letter in his pocket, buoyantly he went forth. Knowing now something

of his methods, Augusta sat in positive expectation. She was of course at work, for although she had recently touched the fringe of disquieting introspection, she had not got so far as the slough. Resolute endeavour could still stay the foot. She rose from her chair, and greeted her visitor with easy cordiality. He perhaps gave her hand the slightest additional pressure.

‘Your patience is exemplary,’ he laughed. ‘Have you got it?’

His eye went over the table unsuccessfully, and Augusta produced the manuscript from a drawer behind. He took it, and tore up page after page with ludicrous composure, his companion looking on aghast.

‘That is outrageous, Mr. Wanless——’

‘Every word of yours is true,’ remarked he, emphatically. ‘The thing has served its turn——’

‘But it has a definite value,—an artistic value; nay, if it were only a commercial value, this course is preposterous.’

‘I don’t measure such things by the criterion of commerce, Miss Lavington, and as for the mere artistic standard I begin to distrust it.’

‘For the purely didactic?’ asked she in alarm, her eyes upon the fragments of paper as they fell into her waste-paper basket.

‘For the human,—the definitely civilizing,’ asserted Shiel, calmly. ‘I have, I suppose, succumbed to the social organization to which you once told me I should prove amenable.’

‘But this surely all centres in artistic effort?’

‘Yes, but as applied to realities, and not to mere figments of the brain. We must adopt in actual life our imaginative perceptions; make a fragment of the world the centre of our efforts. This was all right for my own amusement,—possibly for my own advancement; but of what value is it to the world?’

‘The publishers would undoubtedly have given you something for it,’ suggested Augusta, unfortunately.

‘The final proof of its worthlessness,’ cried Shiel, aggressively. ‘That is not the something I will have. Could you honestly ask me to accept it?’ he added, raising his eyes to her in penetrating gaze.

She hesitated.

‘ You could not, Miss Lavington. Your conceptions of literature are not like those of the herd. You know that my morbid communings are of no earthly moment to the race, and their publication but a sacrilegious invasion of sacred domains.’

‘ No, I cannot agree with that. It is a legitimate outlet for intellectual endeavour.’

‘ A recognised outlet, you would say,’ returned Shiel, more placably ;—‘ not a legitimate one. Consider the appalling aggregation of talent being at this moment frittered away in these demoralizing efforts which directed to some honest end might work a regeneration of the world.’

‘ No doubt,’ laughed Augusta, intent upon giving a light turn to a discussion

which her companion seemed determined to take in such terrible earnest. 'That is inevitable in a civilization of such abnormal complexity.'

'But is it not one's duty to counteract it? At any rate, not consciously to further it?'

'I can scarcely admit that. Life upon first principles is no longer feasible. One cannot counteract an age.'

'No, but one can repudiate it. Even in this land and in this age something like a rational existence is still feasible. One can feel one's soul from the natural sources of inspiration even yet, and do definite labour in the promotion of a humanizing ideal.'

'One blessed with a poetic temperament no doubt may.'

‘Is it not what you yourself would aim at?’

‘I am afraid not,’ said Augusta, with deplorable levity.

‘But you have constantly spoken of your idealism and your efforts in social causes. Through you wholly was I shaken in my rabid individualism.’

‘But not into poetic transcendentalism,’ smiled she. ‘Progressive action is the breath of life to me; what you, I fear, would hold debilitating luxury. I would import some idealism into our existence certainly, but at the cost of no fraction of our development.’

Shiel uncomfortably suspected that this was a blow; but the personal charm of his companion was of such potency that he speedily rallied under it.

‘You must surely perceive, Miss Lavington,’ he continued, ‘that this excessive development is wholly inconsistent with idealism, is absolutely antagonistic to it.’

‘Oh, dear no,’ cried she. ‘That is a terrible heresy, Mr. Wanless. I fancy that the reverting to nature is purely a subjective matter. I cannot admit that the tendency of the human intellect is so exclusively pernicious as to demand this rigorous course of repression. I believe its workings to be towards the light.’

‘In the face of all contemporary evidence?’ exclaimed Shiel, starting back in amazement.

‘As a result of it.’

Augusta, quick-witted enough, had no

doubt long since gauged her antagonist's entrenchments, and just possibly found a mischievous enjoyment in accentuating the divergencies of their relative positions.

‘You are too bad,’ said he, recoiling on a personal intonation. ‘You have the advantage of me in jocularity.’

‘By no means. Indeed I speak in exceptional earnestness.’

‘But is it not obvious that imagination is no longer amongst us? That it has wholly succumbed to the gross civilization of the time? It is a faculty defunct,—expired through sheer extremity of inanition.’

‘I think it is pretty generally diffused,’ was the calm contradiction. ‘Not, certainly, as a purely ruminating quality, but as an active agent in the progress of the

world. Why, its very feverishness has become a truism.'

'My dear friend,' urged Shiel, with some solemnity of demeanour, 'you do no justice to your own nobility of instinct. A worthy imagination cannot be feverish in action; it is by nature the very negation of that. It is serene and placid, embracing only the most exalted of issues. Feverishness is of the earth, grovelling, pitiful. Is not life something more serious than this?'

In his exaltation Shiel fixed his gaze perhaps too ardently upon his antagonist, and she moved her eyes.

'Abstractly this is of course true and admirable,' she said, 'but our work must be in reference to our own time.'

'And so it may be in the highest

degree ; I would on no account have it otherwise : but surely in reference to the loftiest of our own time ? Isn't it so ?'

She returned his look with some accession of independence.

'It depends solely upon the individual source of inspiration.'

'But there are sources from which all must drink. You yourself have explained that. No inspiration worthy of the name can be centred in mere feverishness of action. How is such action to be rectified ?'

'Something must inevitably be taken for granted,' said Augusta, nigh driven to impatience. 'Axioms become in course of ages absorbed, Mr. Wanless, and form the very groundwork of volition itself.'

Shiel whistled, although by no means of superabundant humour.

‘We will say so,’ observed he. ‘But is there not one which must receive individual reiteration? Can the axiom of consummate emotion ever be taken for granted?’

Augusta glanced at him inquiringly.

‘I hardly understand.’

‘You acknowledge the social impulse; you have confessed it your most powerful stimulus. How do you reconcile this with indifference to—repudiation of marriage?’

The man’s excessive tremulousness was well disguised. He kept his lips firmly closed.

‘Repudiation of marriage! So far from repudiating it, in its only sane aspect I regard it as the highest ultimate goal. It is as a profession that I loathe and repudiate it.’

‘As a goal *here*—in the midst of this sordid, suicidal discord?’ cried Shiel, rising from his chair, and looking out of the window. ‘Can it be other than a profession in such quality of setting? The most imaginative of emotions—the most ethereal of human perceptions—can it possibly exist here? That at least must have some more elementary sustenance. It draws its inspiration from the sun; from all the subtle glories that are interwoven with the divine fabric of the earth, from the first violet pupil in the eye of the morning dew to the latest golden cap upon the elm in the evening. Isn’t it so?’

‘In its most exalted form, no doubt.’

‘In its only genuine form. Then it becomes an impulse of definite significance; a leaven to our whole conception

of the existing world; as you say, the highest ultimate goal.'

'Some of us have to be content with a lesser flight.'

'Wilfully; not necessarily. You yourself, at any rate, know the best.'

'Theoretically,' laughed Augusta. 'I should die under it in practice.'

Shiel's eyes, alight with his excessive emotion, were set on her, but at this they fell. As she turned, her swift glance swept over him.

'All my inspiration springs from incessant action,' she proceeded, quickly and without mercy. 'Poetic reflection, save as a momentary recreation, is none of mine. Ignoble the confession may be, but it is honest. Where the glow of human life is burning, there do I warm

my hands, if I may appropriate Landor. It is of course well that we are not all alike. I hope that I may die, so to speak, fighting. Your inferno, Mr. Wanless, holds fields of amaranth for me. You pity me?’

She asked it with exceptional jocularity, for the man’s collapse was tragical. He started, as though about to charge again, perhaps with some supreme effort in reserve, but—

‘I have no right to do so,’ he replied, attempting a smile. ‘I could wish you a nobler field.’

‘Fields are daily opening before me. In a week or two I shall be studying St. Petersburg; then perhaps Berlin; Vienna, and so on. But the mere locality is nothing. Think of the acquaintance with human life!’

‘I could never fathom one of its most pitiful atoms, so I do not revel in battalions. May all good come to you! I have interrupted you too long.’

Augusta felt some sympathetic compunction as she took his hand, for that there was some sort of a susceptible personality within him she strongly suspected, however oddly presented and misplaced. She bade him good-night, and Shiel departed.

Despite the well-known regularity of her habits, Miss Lavington was not able at once to resume the labours which her visitor had interrupted. Perhaps she reviewed the ideals which Wanless in his imaginative exuberance had thrust upon her, if perchance some unsuspected light might be thrown on them, some hidden recesses revealed. Their definite appli-

cation had not, of course, escaped her, and however ludicrous, at the first realization, in one of Shiel's notorious hostility to the sentimental bond, his extraordinary development might be, it was possible that the facetious dismissal of the comedy was not altogether its final one. That she should never be conformable to his ultra-idyllic representations, Augusta could no doubt quite safely assume ; equally so that his temperament was by no means the indispensable complement of her own ; but this did not exhaust the situation. There was a certain breadth of suggestion inherent in such an incident not likely to elude one of Miss Lavington's delicate susceptibilities. The great traditional crisis of her sex had never been brought so directly home to her ; hence an element

of unusual interest, if nothing more. Certain it was that she stood for some time, folding and unfolding a paper spill, and pondered.

Shiel departed, disillusioned certainly, but not exactly subdued. It was characteristic of his untamed personality that rebuff invariably incited him to savage revolt and aggression, never surrender or acquiescence. If the glove were flung to him he willingly took it, and did not minimize the defiance. So on this occasion. He fled, grinding his teeth.

Before the railings of the British Museum he stopped abruptly in the face of an approaching figure. His emotion had on this occasion sharpened his vision, and not only that, but, as it seemed, his synthetic faculties into the bargain.

‘ You are going there ? ’ he said, vehemently.

‘ To Miss Lavington’s.’

‘ You have not been there before ; why to-night ? ’

Glen, for she it was, said nothing.

‘ Why—tell me ? . . . I know already, but say it.’

‘ Because I knew that you were there,’ said the girl.

He stared at her with a singular fierceness of expression, then turned and hurried on. Glen looked after him, but went to pay her visit notwithstanding. Augusta talked to her for half-an-hour.

In the seclusion of his lodgings Shiel was writing a letter to his friend, Mr. Cuthbert Smart.

CHAPTER VIII.

TOWARDS THE HORIZON.

THE stimulus which Ebba received from contact with Miss Augusta Lavington came opportunely, for the atmosphere of the vicarage had of late weeks been exceptionally dense. It is true her first essay in the intellectual labour market had been eminently successful, for in addition to a letter of restrained approval from her employers accompanying a cheque for twenty pounds, she had received from

them a further commission for a similar effort upon the same terms. Needless to say, it had been with alacrity accepted, and set upon forthwith with all the conscientious zeal which had characterised her previous endeavour. But in the condition of her father, Ebba had found an extraordinary strain upon her nervous strength and courage, and it was just in the recuperation of this subtly sensitive tissue that Augusta's buoyant temperament could be of pre-eminent service.

Mere labour would never have had much power against the invincible resources of Ebba; but recent circumstances had wrought an inordinate development of the sympathetic qualities in her, and herein lay the strain. To be constantly subjected to intuitive flashes upon the tragic

passiveness of her father, at all moments of the day and during all manner of employment, was creating an uncertainty of the nerves, to which her constitution had hitherto been a stranger. Once unable to take her taciturn parent as a matter of course, it was difficult to foresee how much of this insidious suffering she might not be condemned to.

Augusta had found a very noticeable difference in her, and had honestly taxed her with it. With equal frankness Ebba had acquiesced, and knowing her skeleton to be altogether unconcealable, had any mistaken notions thereto impelled her, she had disclosed the whole of her burden to these friendly ears, the only ones which had been taken into any confidence in the matter. Miss Lavington heard the tale in

becoming silence, affronting such experience with neither philosophy nor commonplace.

‘The catastrophe can, of course, never be retrieved or obliterated,’ concluded Ebba, with composure. ‘It is as deep and irremediable as a stroke of paralysis. But—every volume I replace: every work in the identical edition sacrificed do I put upon those shelves. My father is not much over fifty; he may see it, and he might die the easier. But in any case the thing is to be done.’

‘Admirable,’ said Augusta, not moving her eyes from the ground, and no other reference was made to the topic.

Four days only was Miss Lavington able to give to her friend, and of high summer length and brilliancy as they all were,

needless to say that they seemed to be preposterously deficient in the tale of their hours. It mattered not that the buoyant maidens brushed the mountain grass and heather before the dew was gone from them, and still watched the night glow as it crept stealthily round the heights on the northern horizon; the days were wholly inadequate for what was required of them. The new prospect of Augusta aroused all the intellectual ardour of the imprisoned enthusiastic, and in the glare of light which she was enabled to shed upon it, the unaccountable clouds were finally and irrevocably dispersed. Ebba's own shadows, too, fled speedily before such rays of exhilaration.

But the friends by no means confined

themselves to any exclusive subject of conversation. In the vivacity of their discourse one topic led but to inexhaustible divergences which they followed with exuberant zeal. The independence of women was much on their lips, receiving reiterative assertion perhaps more noticeably from Augusta, but with fullest acquiescence, nay incitement, from her companion. It was through this that the development of Shiel came in for definite consideration. Miss Lavington made no secret of her last noteworthy interview with him, if she did not categorically disclose all that she had personally deduced from his behaviour. If on her part surprised, Ebba did not withhold her infinite satisfaction ?

‘ I am convinced that he can be

humanized through no other means,' she asserted. 'Unless he can reduce his universe to some limited proportions, if no ampler than the charms of a woman, he will continue to batter the air to the end of time. I had other hopes of him once, but man is an inscrutable animal. What is his footing with Handsel?'

'Of that I know positively nothing. She undoubtedly is indifferent to all such considerations.'

'Yes, I should think so. That other poor little creature——'

They both shrugged their shoulders.

'The kind of struggle in one of his education vastly surprises me in these days,' said Augusta.

'Yes,' was Ebba's reply, given with some reservation. 'But individuality is so

appallingly complex. You observe his father, and these which were his nurses,' added she, pointing to the ranks of silent hills around them.

'Wasn't Mr. Pettipher also brought up amongst them?'

'But of course it is the ground it falls upon. What can we know of individual character?'

'To be sure . . . Do you know him intimately? . . . Mr. Pettipher, I mean.'

'By no means,' laughed Ebba. 'He and I quarrelled when we were little more than children, and we have practically had no intercourse since. But he has always seemed to me a man made for his calling.'

'And that only?'

'It is a wide one if properly pursued, as he evidently intends to pursue it. You

know that I have never allowed it depth. Indeed I have never known it claim that for itself.'

They were sitting on the warm slope in the shelter of a rock, and Augusta, who had a dry sprig of bilberry in her fingers, was rather assiduously breaking it into minute fragments.

'I suppose not,' she said, 'too idle to look up. 'But, you know, the man strikes me as of distinctly vigorous intellect.'

'I should quite think so.'

'I was always amazed that your brother never sustained intercourse with him. I should have thought that Mr. Pettipher's practical grasp of the world,—yet decidedly intellectual and refined, as you know,—would have been the most valuable

stimulus to one of your brother's disposition.'

'It might have seemed so, but they never were particular friends. Shiel's excessively serious grip no doubt made him antipathetic. He never had a particle of humour.'

'It is a pity.'

Then there would be a space of reflective silence, until Ebba broke out with some imaginative comment upon the stimulating scenery, leading to some playful raillery against all the practical enterprise of benighted humanity.

To Ebba's amazement, her father did not disguise his genuine approval of their visitor's company. At meal-times and at any odd times that he could catch her in

the garden, he would converse readily with Augusta, and listen with interest to her enthusiastic estimate of life. At such moments his brow would lighten perceptibly, and his shoulders grow more erect. In the evenings too (during those hours usually passed, Ebba dared not fancy how, in the Skeleton Chamber), he would ask permission to take a chair in his daughter's room, and hear the animated discussions in which the two indulged, himself taking no part, however, unless directly appealed to.

‘So it once appeared to me,’ he would perhaps on occasion say, with rigid features and expressionless voice.

Upon this particular morning it was the third, as they talked on the hillside beneath the rock, one or other of them per-

ceived the clergyman coming over the heather in their direction. He would stop now and then to pick something from the ground and examine it; then forward again. The two girls watched and talked about him until he was within earshot, then Ebba got up and walked forwards.

‘A letter for you, Abb,’ said the gentleman, feeling in his breast-pocket.

‘Come and sit down, father. The blush on the heather from here is glorious.’

She glanced at the writing as she spoke, but it suggested nothing. The vicar took a seat by Augusta, whilst Ebba read.

‘Did you notice the myriads of ants on the sandy footpath, Miss Lavington?’

The young lady who had recently read the review of a book on ants entered learnedly into the conversation, and again

surprised Mr. Wanless by the universality of her information. Ebba came and sat down on the ground beside them, and listened to their talk, herself examining the growth upon which she was reclining. Looking up at a pause, she saw her father's eyes fixed absently upon her. She handed him the letter.

‘Another invasion, unfortunately,’ was her only comment.

The clergyman read the words signed ‘Cicely Smart,’ in which that lady mentioned the fact of her and her brother's presence in the vicinity, and of their wish to add the pleasure of a visit to Linnbrig vicarage in passing. As their time was limited, she trusted that it would not be inconvenient if they drove over for an hour that afternoon, in a friendly and informal way.

Studying her father's face, Ebba suggested,

‘You remember Mr. Smart—at Oxford three years ago?’

‘A very hazy vision,—yes, a man of much polish—wine—and some sense too.’

‘That was the man,’ said Ebba, joining in the frank laughter with which Augusta received the clergyman's audible reflection.

Mr. Wanless, too, relaxed into a smile at sight of the merry faces before him.

‘Mrs. Smart showed me kindness in London.’

‘Certainly, we shall be glad to see them. The world is not too much with us.’

Such a pleasantry from her father meant much, and Ebba was satisfied proportionately.

She found some little surprise in the

sense of pleasure with which the visit of a sudden inspired herself. Perhaps it was from her evening with the family in London that she found the name Smart suggestive of a warm atmosphere of geniality and refinement; something altogether apart from life and the world as she had practically known and conceived them; a domain of romance into which intellectual and material strife was forbidden to enter. Mere bourgeois acquiescence could arouse all that was pugnacious—even vituperative—in Ebba, but in the sunlight complacency of this notable instance of polite well-being she affected to discern some very subtle distinction. All in her limited contact with it was harmonious. Not a word or slightest episode arose to mar the flawless purity of the

conception. Not so much as a paltry book had she discovered in their drawing-room,—a crucial test with Ebba, notwithstanding the ludicrous limits of her experience. The young lady by no means courted strife in her universe, as her brother, for instance, most undoubtedly did; thus it was that the contemplation of an ideal standard, however remote from her own actual portion allotted, could at least afford her unruffled delight.

This threatened visit, then, supplied yet another acceptable source of diversion. When the three had walked leisurely homewards through the heath, talking of this and that suggested by the way; lingered in the garden, and then separated to prepare for the mid-day meal; Ebba found herself quite eagerly surveying the

modest adornments of her drawing-room, touching a curtain here, amplifying a ribbon bow there, and running for an additional rose-bud to enliven a little nook somewhere else. The vicarage rooms were inevitably tasteful, with whatsoever unexpectedness you had entered them, although strictly accordant to an income of three hundred pounds per annum; but, for an occasion like the present, the fastidious eye of the young housewife could see a trifling improvement which seemed superfluous until the result was effected.

In casting her eye round the entrance-hall with a view to this special manipulation, she saw a paper or two under the table, and leaned down to bring them out. Her practised eye instantly recognized the unopened bookseller's catalogue, a form of

circular by which the Linnbrig vicarage had been from the time of her earliest memory very liberally inundated, and one in which during recent weeks Ebba had displayed a quite extraordinary interest. She had discovered during the same period that her father persistently dispatched them to the kitchen paper-box unopened, and her maid had received determinate instructions in consequence. As Ebba now snatched these new ones to herself, (apparently arrivals of that day,) her father's step was behind her. Without obvious cause, both were conscious of restraint.

‘Waste-paper, Abb,’ said the clergyman, passing on to the dining-room.

‘Yes, father, but I like just to glance through them.’

Augusta, descending, heard nothing more.

It was about half-past two when the wagonette entered the vicarage gateway. To Ebba, sitting in the garden, the wheels had long been audible through the still sunlit air, and, although conversing placidly with Augusta, quite a flutter of excitement had chronicled the lessening distance. When at length, in her picturesque, airy summer gown, she went forward to greet her visitors, in addition to the frank smile which was their surest welcome, perhaps her cheeks betrayed just the slightest increase of colour; they had been exceptionally pale of late. Cuthbert's straw hat was, of course, manipulated with finished grace, and let the thermometer register what it might, he presented

his accustomed appearance of imperturbable calm and good humour. Miss Cicely did not disguise her ecstatic state, and almost before she had shaken hands, burst into raptures over the idyllic scene. Mr. Wanless appeared upon the doorstep as the vehicle drove up, and renewed his casual acquaintanceship with the whilom undergraduate in a friendly, but eminently characteristic manner. Cuthbert could accommodate himself befittingly to anybody, from the chancellor of his university to the shoeblack in the street, should circumstances render it temporarily necessary, so that he found little difficulty with a taciturn clergyman, who obviously wished to be amenable, however undemonstrative the effort. The two gentlemen included Augusta in their confidences; Ebba and

Miss Smart formed an appropriate alliance.

As the visitors had come ostensibly to see the country, it seemed only natural that Mr. Wanless should supply the conversation on his part largely from his exhaustive topographical studies; and doing so, he could by no possibility have had a profounder or more intelligent listener than appeared in Mr. Cuthbert Smart. He asked exactly the right questions, interposed exactly the right comments, and altogether behaved as if the topography of the border was the one topic to which he henceforth intended to devote his solid talents and his time. Shiel had explicitly disclosed to Smart his own footing at the vicarage, so that the only subject which could have caused a hitch was securely avoided. The meeting

with Miss Lavington, too, had a certain interest for Cuthbert, as her features had been familiar to him for some time, through a photograph added to his interesting collection by the good offices of his friend Pettipher. Intercourse therefore proceeded pleasantly enough.

When Ebba and her companion rejoined them, a visit to the vicar's church seemed a proper diversion. It was not that the edifice offered any peculiar architectural attractions, being, like most moorland churches, solid and plain, and of no extraordinary antiquity, but from the lips of Mr. Wanless, such as there was, assumed its full measure of interest and importance. From the graveyard, too, he could point out a few objects in the landscape of historical or legendary in-

terest, and these seemed to appeal with much force to the visitors' susceptibilities. Anything that Ebba chanced to interpose was also received with suitable attention, obtaining perhaps a marked measure of respect from Mr. Cuthbert Smart particularly. It was just beneath the east window of the building that this gentleman evinced an absorbing curiosity in a noticeable gravestone, and as Miss Wanless chanced to be the nearest to him, she paused to afford him the requisite information about it.

‘Remarkable,’ said Cuthbert, in return for the elucidation. ‘Just the thing I should like for myself.’

‘That’s what I wish,’ replied Ebba, gaily, extending her finger in the direction of Tam Tallon’s Crag on the summit of

a hill opposite. ‘I don’t believe I should rest anywhere else, Mr. Smart.’

‘I didn’t know you possessed so much of your brother,’ smiled Cuthbert.

‘After it’s all over, that’s the spot,—free to the elements . . . But I wished to ask you—do you hear anything of Shiel?’

‘Very decidedly,—that partly has brought me here. He is going through some curious experiences. Has he told you nothing?’

‘Nothing at all. I have not heard from him since I left London.’

‘Then it will surprise you to know that he is at present seeking work as an artisan, or something of that sort.’

‘Not wholly,’ said Ebba, looking far before her. ‘I have expected something critical.’

‘Yes, a most remarkable story,’ Smart began, but coming upon the rest of the company as they turned the corner, he passed off his remark lightly.

Ebba’s sympathy, however, was definitely aroused, and much of the situation being in her own hands, she would permit no consideration to come in the way of a full satisfaction of her curiosity. The general intercourse proceeded with all smoothness, nobody’s interest in the surroundings being one jot abated. It was when the movement towards the vicarage commenced that Ebba’s tactics were required. Miss Cicely, being no doubt in the confidences of her brother, afforded yeoman’s service, and the matter became a simple one. In the most natural manner possible, the distance between the vicar

and his two ladies in front, and Mr. Smart with his one behind, was imperceptibly increased, and freedom of debate securely established.

‘Of course, of the moving influences I know nothing,’ Cuthbert was saying, soberly. ‘Shiel is not the most communicative of mortals. Some powerfully mollifying influence has been at work for many weeks, to such a degree indeed that up to a few days ago he quite seriously entertained the project of going into the church, with a view to a small living which happens just now to come within range of our family influence. He went down into Dorset with me, and we spent a few days most delightfully there; he was more vivacious than I ever knew him, and laying exuberant schemes for an imagin-

ative life upon ideal lines. Two days ago I received a note from him, which I presumed to be his final acceptance, but which proved to be this.'

Ebba scanned the sheet whereon her brother had scribbled his curt dismissal of the project which had been proposed to him, adding that his temporizing had sprung from a momentary, if preposterous, delusion, and that he was about to adopt the only sane course open to an honest man—that of definite manual labour. Smart replaced the letter in his pocket.

'I cannot think that he is to prove utterly frustrate,' said Ebba, with unusual expressiveness. 'He will carve his way to something,—yes, he will, I am convinced of it. Any attempt to influence him directly would be puerile.'

‘So I believe. You will hardly think that the object of my journey here is to depress you, Miss Wanless. Shiel is vigorous enough, and can, as you expressively put it, carve out his way effectually. If I know that you acquiesce in this, I shall feel easier.’

Cuthbert just turned his head to glance at her, as though to emphasize his sympathetic attitude.

‘Do not add me to your burdens, Mr. Smart, on any account,’ smiled she. ‘Your kindness is sufficiently ample already.’

‘I only wish it could be more ample in effect. I must beg you to pardon any seeming impertinence in my behaviour. My familiarity with Shiel no doubt leads me to unwarrantable lengths. I had

another suggestion to make, but really, the glimpse of your situation here rather disarms me. And your selection of a tombstone, too.'

Ebba laughed easily.

'The fact is, I had wondered whether Mr. Wanless would have any inclination to migrate to the south. The living is about four hundred a-year, and the setting idyllic. You will not misinterpret it if I mention the fact of our having a house there, where my mother and sister will, I expect, ultimately spend much of their time; and I can safely assure you that to us the neighbourhood would acquire very substantial additional attractions from Mr. Wanless and your being in it.'

'I wish I could feel more complacency in your consideration,' returned Ebba.

‘That I more than appreciate it I hope you know. Oh, the prospect would be delightful, but,’—she shook her head—‘but it is too late. My father’s energy is spent, and I know too well that nothing would induce him to change his sphere of labour. He is not a sociable man, Mr. Smart, and a change in his surroundings would be irksome, nay, intolerable, to him.’

‘You will suggest it?’

‘By all means, and you shall have his decision with all speed. But it is already given.’

‘I shall be grieved if it prove so. Could you not persuade him just to come down and see the place? You know with what delight my mother would entertain you. It is really a charming region, and as

secluded as one could wish,—Shiel admitted that, and you know he is fairly fastidious. A supreme contrast to this, of course, but in another way not to be surpassed.'

Ebba looked before her as she said,

'I will faithfully submit it.'

'To you yourself it would not be distasteful, Miss Wanless?'

'Delightful in many respects, for really the remoteness here becomes occasionally oppressive; but no doubt I scarcely know how deeply we are rooted here,' she added, soberly.

'New associations might perhaps be formed,' urged Cuthbert, mildly. 'Not that they could possibly replace the old, I know; but life is progressive, isn't it? And, if there is a certain pathos in shat-

tering the past, there is a compensating glory in looking forward to the undeveloped future.'

Cuthbert was not commonly so sententious, but it seemed in perfect harmony with his bearing, and Ebba by no means felt it ridiculous. She contented herself with some commonplace response.

'We are grossly selfish,' continued Cuthbert, 'despite our most virtuous resolutions. I pat myself on the back with the presumptuous reflection that I may possibly be making a suggestion for the ultimate enjoyment of Mr. Wanless and yourself; but in reality my own gratification is at the root of it. Some of my most enjoyable associations centre in that Dorsetshire village, and I would fain add to them, I suppose. It is a sweet

spot, and Shiel's idealism inspired even me with some measure of romance. I wish you could have heard him.'

'Certainly I should have liked to.'

Ebba glanced quickly at the gate before them, which set a term to their conversation, and it might have been thought that the slightest shadow of regret was for an instant in her eyes. But Cuthbert did not see it. Of his own feeling, however, he made no secret.

'Well, here I suppose the day ends,' said he, looking around him, not without a suspicion of dry, characteristic humour in his tone. 'There is a curious magic about these hills of which, even from this brief glimpse, I am deeply sensible. In spite of what I have said, Miss Wanless, I am not sure that one is free from sacrilege

in trying to separate you from them.'

'Admirable!' cried Ebba, with artless vivacity. 'I desire no more exquisite compliment.'

And, going forward, Cuthbert's saying was repeated in an indirect and modified form to the satisfaction of the whole company.

There was no more private conversation, what time remained being devoted to the necessary indoor hospitality and general intercourse in the immediate neighbourhood of the vicarage. Ebba took her part gracefully with a vague, repressed gladness in it all which imparted a peculiar charm to her usually reticent and undemonstrative personality. Her passages with Mr. Smart now and then drifted into a familiarly argumentative or more or less

playful vein, in which some of the less obvious characteristics of the two found pleasant utterance. In parting, Mr. Wanless himself, in placid manner, expressed his obligations to the visitors for an exceptionally agreeable afternoon, an admission which met with less restrained reciprocation.

‘Quite a delightful household,’ said Cuthbert to his sister, as they drove towards the world again. ‘Don’t you think so, Ciss?’

‘Quite, quite. St. Abb is really charming. It is not difficult to see that she, poor girl, constitutes the household. Mr. Wanless, I should fancy, is not easy to manage in private. How many girls, nowadays, would endure such an existence, and make such a paradise out of it?

I really cannot sufficiently admire her. Will he accept, do you think ?'

Cuthbert shook his head, gloomily for him.

'He is an odd man evidently. But it was hardly likely after a lifetime in a place. They are peculiarly attached to these regions.'

'Oh, what a pity !'

When the visitors had gone, Ebba caught her father in the garden, with an eye perhaps to the utilization of the exceptional social concessions in him. She came up to him laughing, the glow in her own cheeks not yet faded.

'Mr. Smart had not courage to disclose to you the only object of his visit, father, so he asked me to do so. He came to

offer you a living in Dorset; a small, secluded parish, with a stipend of four hundred a-year.'

'It was very kind of him,' replied Mr. Wanless, without raising his eyes from the ground. 'But of course I shall die here . . . He is a man of considerable means then?'

'I believe so. They live in a distinguished manner.'

The clergyman enlarged upon the personal merits of Cuthbert, displaying in his remarks an unexpected shrewdness of perception, noticeable even to his daughter. Nothing more was said about the south-country living, so that night Ebba wrote a letter to Miss Smart with the decision.

For the remainder of Augusta's visit the vicarage was left undisturbed, the two

young ladies resuming their buoyant criticism of various matters in heaven and earth. If Miss Lavington noticed any modification of minor points in her friend's philosophy after that afternoon's interruption, she was of course too polite to betray anything of her observation. She herself made not the slightest objection to the fuller scrutiny of poetical standards for which Ebba seemed inclined; the sympathetic analysis of the refinements which affluence induces, and one or two other aspects of civilization, on the conventional ritual, but hitherto not specifically examined by this inquisitive pair.

But Ebba did not forget that their intercourse must end, and that there was still an important matter demanding some time. It was late that night, after her father had

retired, that the book catalogues were brought out, and the list discussed. Augusta joyfully undertook the commission, receiving no less a sum than thirty-five pounds in notes for the purpose.

‘It will lay a substantial corner-stone to the foundation,’ said Ebba, rubbing her white palms. ‘But the edifice is a vast one. How long will you give me?’

‘Two years,’ laughed Augusta.

‘Ay, more than that. But we shall see. Don’t forget those addresses,—the very first thing.’

As the two drove to the station the following morning, a violent thunder-storm burst over them, but in their spirits they vastly enjoyed it.

‘St. Petersburg, just fancy,’ muttered

Ebba, as the railway-carriage door separated them. ‘And I to Linnbrig vicarage.’ She laughed aloud at the contrast. They waved hands as the train departed, and the figure of each dwelt with the other as a remembrance.

Two or three days later Ebba was smuggling parcels into the house of her father.

CHAPTER IX.

REVERSE.

THE departure of Miss Lavington did not materially affect the placid designs of that odd acquaintance towards whom the impetuous journalist had endeavoured to assume the position of self-constituted directress. Handsel owned one of those dogged, unmalleable dispositions which are found associated with intellects of the greatest diversity of calibre. If they are inevitably connected with mental power of

so great profundity as to be unfathomable and unavailable even to its oblivious owner, they may just as assuredly be an accompaniment of parts stolid only through excess of sensibility, and conscious nevertheless of their own vitality and range.

Handsel was what we should call now-a-days unsophisticated, old-fashioned. She required her spiritual development for a definitely limited object; neither for a polite assertive veneer on the one hand, by means of which she might make a passably genteel livelihood, without, metaphorically, taking off her coat; nor, on the other, as a self-assuring cosmogony by means of which the human modesty of æons became but the shackles of deep bedlam, to be vehemently, irremediably, riven by the miasmatic flash from the

chaos of one decade. This obtuse shepherdess impugned not the universe, resented not her own relation to it. When she thought consciously, so widely, which was not often, she was elated by the glory rather than crushed by the immensity. She had been alone with infinity in mountain solitudes, so that it was not that she did not know some of the questions it could put.

The girl was simply unscientific enough to take something for granted, and therefrom sprang all her placidity and strength. Herein she was a poet, and poets being, as we know, born and not made, Handsel could claim but little merit for the virtue. The benign fates in seeing her abroad had proclaimed, 'Calm shall be thy voyage, and from the sun of heaven shalt thou

draw thy breath. The winds of earth shall not prevail against thee.'

But late crucial experiences had not been without effect upon her. She was not the free-fancied maiden that had sped so buoyantly from the hills in search of educational development in the abstract. Little as she thought it even yet, the step had imposed the fulness of womanhood upon her. A rustic girl cannot easily sustain an ideal attitude with regard to the common exigencies of life, and Handsel would have claimed no particularity in matters of that kind. No doubt in this matter-of-fact experience lies their surest safeguard against sentimental surprises, for common sense is potent where idealism may be fallacious enough. With regard to the sentimental relations, Handsel was

as shrewd as her kind, and from seeing them thus broadly they had never had the slightest effect against her. Oddly enough (to any of the accredited dogma; in natural sequence, perhaps, to one or two here and there), it was her few weeks in the town which were to imbue the girl with the approved ideal of sex. The direct contact with this problem which her cousin Glen had literally thrust upon her had no doubt not been without its initial influence, —if no farther than by the momentary connection of Shiel Wanless with the predicament. From that moment Shiel had no longer been the asexual companion of childhood's tradition. He had not, of course, assumed any definite reconstitution in her eyes; but he was, at any rate,

a man,—to be dealt with, consciously scrutinized, as such, whatever the degree of familiarity adopted.

Everything of late had tended to an accentuation of this perception: Glen's infatuated immodesty, as of course Handsel could not but regard the little butterfly's irregular behaviour,—no less than Shiel's own undisguised demeanour towards Miss Augusta Lavington. It had thus come that Handsel's imaginative development, in this one vital respect, at any rate, had involuntarily, and with scant consciousness of the fact in any significance, proceeded with subtle reference to the figure and personality of Shiel. The joint evening at the Savoy Theatre had given her the most definite suggestion

hitherto, and, although she had not encountered her companion in that experience since, she had pondered the subject frequently.

The ludicrous incompatibility between Shiel and his chosen idol was the foremost perception of her instinctive meditation. From this, not unnaturally, had followed a personal investigation of the attributes of the respective forces with the inevitable deductions in favour of this or that. In this comparison, contrast we may call it, lurked much that was perplexing, and beyond it Handsel had not as yet very definitely proceeded. To aid her, if aid it rendered, Augusta had with characteristic frankness disclosed the episode in which Shiel's manuscript had centred, with perhaps more than a merely general allusion to

the attendant circumstances. Handsel thereupon did confess to a certain commiseration for the man.

A short time was still to elapse before any opportunity of more direct investigation was to present itself. When it did, it was not without a distinct impression upon Handsel. One of the early days of September,—a wet and miserable week had set in, imparting to the streets a gloomy foreshadowing of autumn,—she was going to spend a morning amongst the corridors of birds at South Kensington. Occasional apologies of this kind to the aerial instinct in her were found necessary, and the tastefully displayed mummies proved vastly preferable for the purpose to the appalling infernos of Regent's Park and St. Andrew Street. Wrapped up in a waterproof and

screened by her umbrella, Handsel was making her way to the Gower Street Station to pursue from there her westerly journey. On turning a corner, the dull grey vista of the long thoroughfare loomed before her, the chill rain-laden north wind driving full in her face, and the wheels of a solitary trade van rumbling over the sloppy concrete freely bespattering her with mire. The young woman was inured to these conditions by this time, and plodded on unconcernedly.

Half-way along the street she came to where the van had stopped opposite one of the doorways by the pavement. The carman, who had apparently just leaped down, was standing beside it, and near him, looking up with woeful countenance into the face of the man to whom she was

speaking, stood the figure of a small girl. The man was well protected by a long coat and leggings, but the child offered a piteous spectacle. The rags in which she was huddled were literally soaked with water, the shape of her stunted figure being at all points obvious through the clinging garments about her, whilst the rain trickled down from any point towards which it gathered. Such sights were of course not now new to Handsel, but she could never pass them without experiencing the same tremulous sensation. As the man seemed addressing the child with some seriousness she could not intrude upon them, but she had no sooner passed them than she suddenly lingered.

‘Where?’ she had heard the man say with noticeable emphasis. Turning, she

could not overhear the muttered answer, but she saw the large and the little hand encounter, and partly gathered the stern injunction delivered by the elder.

‘Everything off, you understand, and trust you . . . if you lie to-night.’

Therewith the man went down the area steps to deliver a parcel he had been holding, and the child hurried on her way. But Handsel still stood there. When the benevolent carman re-emerged, she turned to confront him, and met, as she had expected, the familiar aggressive stare of Mr. Shiel Wanless. He betrayed the greater surprise.

‘Your sister has been anxious for your address,’ said Handsel, as though such a meeting were an every-day occurrence.

‘Yes, I have meant to send it her,’
was his reply. ‘Are you all right?’

She gave him an affirmative, and nod-
ding lightly he got into his cart again and
it rumbled on past her.

Handsel continued her journey, but the
birds that day utterly failed in their at-
tractions. She wandered about the spa-
cious galleries and gazed you might have
thought intently about her, but she was
conscious of a singular obscuration of
vision. The voices of plovers and curlews
were in her ears, and never had they
called with such intensity of wailing.
The sound had an unknown potency over
all her senses, thrilling and dulling them
in turn. Early she took her way home-
wards, unusually tired.

That day was Saturday, and in the

evening she received a note, requesting her to meet the writer the following morning at a place and hour stated. It did not wholly surprise her, and it undoubtedly afforded her some measure of satisfaction, for it was inevitable that curiosity should now find some place in her emotions. Handsel went, and Shiel had been there before her.

In holiday garb there was no noticeable difference between the furniture dealer's carman and the literary Oxford graduate of aggressive temperament. The individual Shiel Wanless was common to both, and, as his Sunday wardrobe had required no replenishment since his change of calling, the two might upon one day in the week pass as identical. To the closer observer physiognomical diversities might

no doubt have been presented, and Handsel, being entitled to inclusion amongst such, presumably found suggestive allusion in her old friend's countenance.

Shiel greeted her with comparative gaiety, and was particular in his inquiries as to the interval since their former intercourse. The girl had not any exciting story to unfold, and after touching modestly upon her intellectual employments did not scruple to insinuate that the interesting experiences lay in another quarter. Shiel laughed.

‘Yes, like Dogberry, I have had losses,’ said he, lightly. ‘The world begins to look somewhat different to me.’

‘Pleasanter, no doubt.’

He threw a quick suspicious glance at her, but recalled it.

‘I didn’t say that. Do you think it likely?’

‘I do.’

The girl’s dogmatic independence was nothing new to him, but coming so abruptly upon his recent experiences it seemed strange and perhaps a little irritating. It is never agreeable to confront a contrast to the emphasizing of one’s own peculiar caprices.

‘Have you entirely given up your writing?’ asked Handsel, determined at all events to extract something from the interview now that it was presented to her.

‘I am now wholly what you saw me. The other is a mad delusion,—a nightmare of the devil. Haven’t you yet found it out?’

‘I never tried it.’

‘But you read,—you pretend to cultivate your intellect,’ exclaimed Shiel, with a sarcastic glance.

‘Not for the vexation it can give.’

‘What else can it give? “He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow,” even according to your own authorities. Unless one can divest oneself of this intellectual incubus, there is no quietude on this earth.’

‘Argument canna help you, Mr. Shiel. But you were not of this mind that night at the theatre.’

‘I was not, and why?’ he burst out. ‘Because yet another delusion more diabolical than the intellectual one possessed me: for nothing else.’

For some seconds they walked on in

silence, now turning into the Marylebone Road, Shiel staring doggedly ahead. This was the first confession he had made, beyond the limits of his own consciousness, of that extraordinary lapse from his frigidly individualistic theory. At the time of its experience he had made not the slightest effort to screen his condition from this one solitary companion, and perhaps some stinging recollection of this prompted the present repudiation. He had recoiled from that experience, and all the reactionary concession which it betokened. It assailed him at a point where irritable natures are most vulnerable; he had gone out from Augusta in a state of renewed hostility against himself. Little else had he gained from her.

It was exasperating to him now to

acknowledge that he was so far human. All those tragical accusations from the eyes of a supernumerary generation had been to him in his need of no more account than they are to the policeman and sentimental housemaid. To this had he fallen, and, what perhaps was worse, Handsel had witnessed his degradation. It was in the first frenzy of this recoil that he had plunged into his present employment. It seemed to him then that some more tangible repudiation was needful than lay in purely imaginative commotion. The moment had arrived when a certain portion of his life could be discarded, and another of greater reality be assumed. One exodus at least should be made, and he had made it with characteristic energy and completeness.

The resolution having been come to, and the letter to Cuthbert Smart dispatched, Shiel passed a few days in very determined activity. That his labour should be manual, and safely divorced from contemporary educational requirements, he was firmly resolved, therefore the vast world of clerkdom was closed against him. Of technical handicrafts, again, of course he knew nothing, whereby another wide limitation was imposed. Trade journals and directories were extensively consulted, and numberless inquiries made, in a very short space of time ; but no success resulted. His haven had at length been accidentally reached, and in a direction towards which he had not previously turned. One morning, in passing down Tottenham Court Road, at

the commencement of a day to be spent as those before it had been, he overheard a conversation in front of a furniture establishment there, and, without another moment's hesitation or inquiry, he turned in at the door. His demand for some person in authority was acceded to, and an interview in private, of no doubt a more or less remarkable description, immediately ensued. The result was that, in the course of half-an-hour, Shiel Wanless passed from the shop in all the dignity of a furniture carman, at the weekly remuneration of twenty shillings, in return for services explicitly declared. Two days more were to elapse before he entered upon his duties. But the man lost no time in adjusting himself to the altered situation. All evidences of scholarship

he was proud to disown, albeit some frailty of instinct restrained him in one important particular. Although his books were no longer to be about him, he winced at the suggestion of disposing of them for cash. A compromise was ultimately acquiesced in, which was perhaps scarcely worthy of the rest. The books were packed and warehoused at a public repository,—to await, jocosity or malice might mildly have insinuated, some future determination. A lodging of appropriate meanness he found in a little by-street off Hampstead Road, and there he proposed to start the world afresh.

Despite the vehemence of the initial impetus, we may suppose that this step taxed Shiel's heroism to the utmost. The

mere labour and comparative squalor need by no means have disquieted him; but the inevitable contact with humanity which his position entailed. Some sort of trial there must have been here. As secluded hitherto as though a hermit in his cavern, the purely obvious considerations could scarce be the final ones for him. But what else may have been presented nobody ever knew. To his sister he had not yet written. Her letter, equally with those from Smart and, yes, Handsel, was returned through the official channel as 'Gone, left no address.' When he would have re-emerged, had not this casualty betrayed him, must remain undecided like much besides.

Even now no plenary confession of

matters of mere fact was vouchsafed to his companion, although a certain satisfaction seemed to accrue to him from the familiar intercourse. He asked not for Miss Lavington, and Handsel did not volunteer any information upon that particular topic. But she talked frankly and with all her old freedom from restraint. As he seemed yet ready to speak theoretically of himself in preference to wider subjects, she readily indulged him, for the matter had still some measure of interest for herself. It is possible, too, that she owned some subtler, more disinterested impulse to endurance, for that yesterday's appearance of the man had much impressed her. She realised it now as she glanced at him in speaking.

‘You talk of this and that delusion,

Mr. Shiel,' at length Handsel felt constrained to interpose, 'and that you have got well rid of them, but are you aware of being more content?'

'Content?' fired he, stepping behind to allow her to precede him through a gateway. 'Who is fool enough to look for it?'

'You and every human soul ought to be. Without it your life is a farce.'

There was a momentary warmth in the young woman's assertion which sat well upon her, however unfamiliar of late.

'So I thought in an insane moment.'

There was not the anger in his tone which she had expected.

'It was a pity then that you did not continue insane,' returned she. 'It is nothing less than a tragedy that one so

capable of the fullest enjoyment of the universe should be passing through it in such terrible darkness.'

'Is this your vein, Handsel?' said Shiel, not without astonishment. 'When did you learn that I was so capable of enjoyment?'

'Have I only known you from yesterday? I have seen you in other scenes, you ken; scenes in which the soul for those that have any, can get above the housetops, catch a glimpse of life above the level of the pavement. There the curlew and the——'

'There I gathered all my fatuity, imbibed all the poison that for ever haunts me,' cried he, with unexpected vehemence.

'Dinna think it,' said Handsel, mildly, —sustaining with or without purpose her

old vernacular. 'That is one more of your delusions that you may well get rid of.'

'Then what brings you here?' asked Shiel, reduced to derisive laughter.

'That I may learn all *that* more thoroughly. Do you think that I could have told you this when I was cutting the whin yonder?'

'I should be glad of your prescription.'

'Content.'

'Don't exasperate me with the trash of the Philistines. Is content to be gathered like blaeberries, do you suppose?'

'Very likely, if you go the right way about it. Let me tell you, Mr. Shiel, that *you* will never find it where there are no blaeberries.'

'Just as certainly that I shall never

find it where they are. You are a shallow reasoner, Handsel; but come we are not going to waste these few minutes in vapid platitudes that would suit that crowd of buffoons over yonder: I am not overburdened with human intercourse, if you are. Let us talk sanely whilst we are together. I have to attend to the horses presently.'

Shiel laughed aloud if not hilariously, and for some minutes they went on in silence. But Handsel was not discomfited. The fulness of the enormity surged within her, and her lips frequently trembled with the message that was on them, if something made it difficult of effectual utterance. Oh, if for a moment she could have had the gift of eloquence, she felt that now at this instant she could irrevocably have

saved him ! The very simplicity of her intellect enabled her to gauge him pretty accurately, to extend no doubt such plenitude of sympathy. How could she associate his figure with this abnormal complexity of existence ? he to her vision the merest bit of whinstone rock on the barren moorland ? The primitive undevelopment of his whole being was revealed so flagrantly to her, and yet to himself it could by no possibility be presented. She must make another effort, come what might.

‘ But we may talk sanely even on this topic,’ said she, as though there had been no interruption. ‘ We *must* talk sanely upon it. You cannot continue your life as you are now doing.’

‘ Will you convert me, my lass ?’ smiled he.

‘Your own reason will.’

‘I have done with it.’

‘You must know that you have never found it. You have done with it for all that it has hitherto done for you, but what is that? Art and learning is not for the destruction of life, but for the increase of it. Doesn’t it give a glow to the commonest labour if properly engaged in? Not here, of course, for man has destroyed all pleasure in labour, but in places where real life is possible.’

This to him, and a graduate of Oxford. Augusta too had mentioned axioms.

‘Art and learning appeal to the intellect, and that is woe, wheresoever it is exerted.’

It was of course characteristic that, throughout his experiences, Shiel should

confound all intellectual effort with purely subjective fog.

‘Then this is not the intellect that I know. I can see one that imparts sunlight to life, that sees itself in its own placid proportions, and that devours food for the purpose of strengthening and enjoying its vision. I can only hope that you may find it.’

‘Don’t aggravate me by your talk of imaginary rubbish,’ returned Shiel, more fiercely. ‘All fanatics and visionaries talk imbecility of this kind. I had hoped, Handsel, that you were above it.’

‘It is certainly more visionary and imbecile to make oneself the centre of the universe,’ said the girl, warmly.

‘What if you are compelled to?’

‘Nobody is compelled to. But I only annoy you, we may as well part.’

‘Certainly. Good-bye.’

They shook hands with alacrity and went in opposite directions.

But they were no sooner separated than Handsel regretted her impetuosity. Perhaps she had not expected him so instantly to accept her offer. She found that this interview, brief and ruffled as it had appeared to be, had not diminished her interest in his predicament, her generous intolerance of the unreason presented by it. As she paced the pathways, past visions of him in other situations recurred to her, and she affirmed and reaffirmed the conclusions she had come to. Let his mere scholarship be what it might, she was assured that of human education he was wholly

incapable—in such channels as those through which he had hitherto sought it. There was nothing introspective about Handsel, therefore she questioned not her own curiosity in the matter. That this man, with whom she had been familiar from childhood, and who, as a vague kind of manly prototype, had had a part in her formative reflections, presented now a very pathetic figure to her, was all she knew or cared for. With whatever impatience she permitted herself verbally to address him, in her retrospect she could find nothing but sympathy for his sufferings, wholly free from the intolerant contempt that such a spectacle might have aroused in a more sophisticated beholder.

Shiel had immediately left the park, resolved to relapse more completely into the

part which he had adopted. Early associations had been able to impart a fitful pleasure to the prospect of occasional intercourse with Handsel, but since she too was so flagrantly of the herd, he could discard her with all else that he had so vigorously repudiated.

Whilst passing the groups in the Broad Walk, and finding some diversion in mental criticism of individuals presented, Handsel felt herself seized from behind in an unceremonious manner peculiar to a certain form of exuberant humour. She awaited patiently the permission to turn round, and then faced the attractive figure that she had of course expected.

‘Do *you* honour such a low assembly?’ asked Glen, with a look of genuine pleasure which belied her frivolity.

‘You over-estimate your importance, little lass,’ laughed her cousin. ‘The assembly consists of more than one.’

‘How clever you have got,’ pouted the other. ‘But I was coming to see you to-night.’

‘You know that you are welcome. Will you come home with me now? I can give you some dinner.’

‘I can’t now, thanks. But what time shall I come?’

‘I shall not go out after four.’

‘All right,—ta-ta.’

With a pretty smile Glen fluttered off to another young lady who was walking up the roadway, and Handsel just glanced until they were hidden by others. Very soon after she was on her way homewards.

It was about five o’clock when Glen

arrived, and she then appeared in less exuberant spirits. Handsel was having tea, and a spare cup was out upon the table. The visitor threw off her jacket and then herself into a chair. She took the cup handed to her in silence, but declined bread-and-butter. As she sipped she looked askance at her cousin.

‘Regent’s Park is a pleasant place, isn’t it?’

The question was such an odd one that Handsel did not immediately answer it. She simply looked at the well-dressed figure complacently.

‘This doesn’t do for me, hinny,’ at length she said. ‘Explain yourself.’

‘It is a nice place to have a walk in when you’re not alone.’

‘If you have heard that I was there

with Mr. Wanless, you have heard the truth. What have you got to say to it?’

‘Oh, nothing; you may do what you like; but you have told me some awful lies, Handsel.’

‘I am not in the habit of telling lies——’

‘Then will you tell me where he lives? I am sure he has left his old place, for——’

‘Certainly, but you know the reception he will give you.’

‘You are not engaged to him?’

Handsel laughed loudly at the look upon the pretty face as it was thrust forward to stare at her.

‘Do you think it likely. Perhaps I am.’

‘You daren’t swear to me that there is nothing between you. I have known from the beginning that you have been deceiving me,’ Glen went on, excitedly. ‘He only came to Miss Lavington’s to see you. Oh, if I had known it before!’

Tears sprang to the fierce bright eyes and the voice was uncertain.

‘Glen,’ said Handsel, with unprecedented gentleness and fervour, ‘do you think that he cares for such as you and me? Surely you must know by now how angry your behaviour made him. I should not recommend you to renew it. As for me——’

‘What did you meet him there for?’

‘I wish you had been there to hear. Nothing to do with love certainly. He has never loved anybody but Miss Lav-

ington, and I very much doubt whether he ever will. But it will be best for you to hear it from him himself. That is his address. Take care how you handle him.'

It was no idle freak of Handsel's. She behaved deliberately, if perchance in the interest of her deluded cousin it might finally dispose of so ridiculous a matter. It seemed to her that Shiel was now ready for its trenchant manipulation.

'Does it satisfy you? Perhaps now you will have some more tea?'

Intercourse thereafter did prove a little more feasible, but despite the mystification which Handsel's apparent frankness was able to substitute for the previous flagrant aggression, Glen took no trouble to disguise what of suspicion and distrust still

lingered. In the course of their conversation Handsel once more revived the subject of their sharing lodgings, but it met with an abrupt refusal.

‘ If you think I am living a low life, you must think it,’ asserted Glen. ‘ But I am not. I can look after myself. Mr. Shiel saved me from that, and I have never done a thing that I daren’t tell him, so there!’

Handsel mused upon her face, but made no audible answer. There was doubtless a spark of sincerity somewhere even in Glen.

It was not until she was about to leave that a letter was given to the visitor, which her cousin stated had come in one of her own the previous night. The recipient’s

hand trembled for an instant as she took it, for there seemed a purposely mystifying reticence in Handsel, which might be construed in various ways. ‘Who from?’ got but a ‘You’ll see,’ in return to it; and, upon Glen’s proposing to read it in the gaslight, the other peremptorily forbade it. ‘Read it when you get home.’ If it was intended to arouse curiosity to a point beyond endurance, this was admirably adapted for the purpose, and it need hardly be stated that, at the first lamp-post which Glen encountered, she stood to examine her treasure. ‘For Glen’ was written outside it, and at the words her heart sank, for the handwriting was familiar. Her teeth clenched as she tore it open, for even in disappointment and

wrath curiosity could not wholly be merged. It was just beginning to rain, and she shook her umbrella impatiently as it would not open. Then sheltered, she read under the gas—

‘MY DEAR GLEN,

‘I purposely refrain from writing for reasons which I trust you understand. But every moment of your day is of interest to me, and if you would care to tell me anything about them it would be a delight to

‘Ever yours,

‘JAMES GILHOLME.’

Glen crumpled the paper passionately in her fingers, and tortured it there for the whole length of the street. Round the corner she tore it into the minutest

fragments, and flung them into the mud. Then she hastened forward to catch a 'bus.

Before retiring to rest that night Glen wrote a letter, but it was not addressed to James. She posted it the next day in the rain.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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